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"BEST IN THE WORLD" GROBBELAAR ON ALISSON





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Contents



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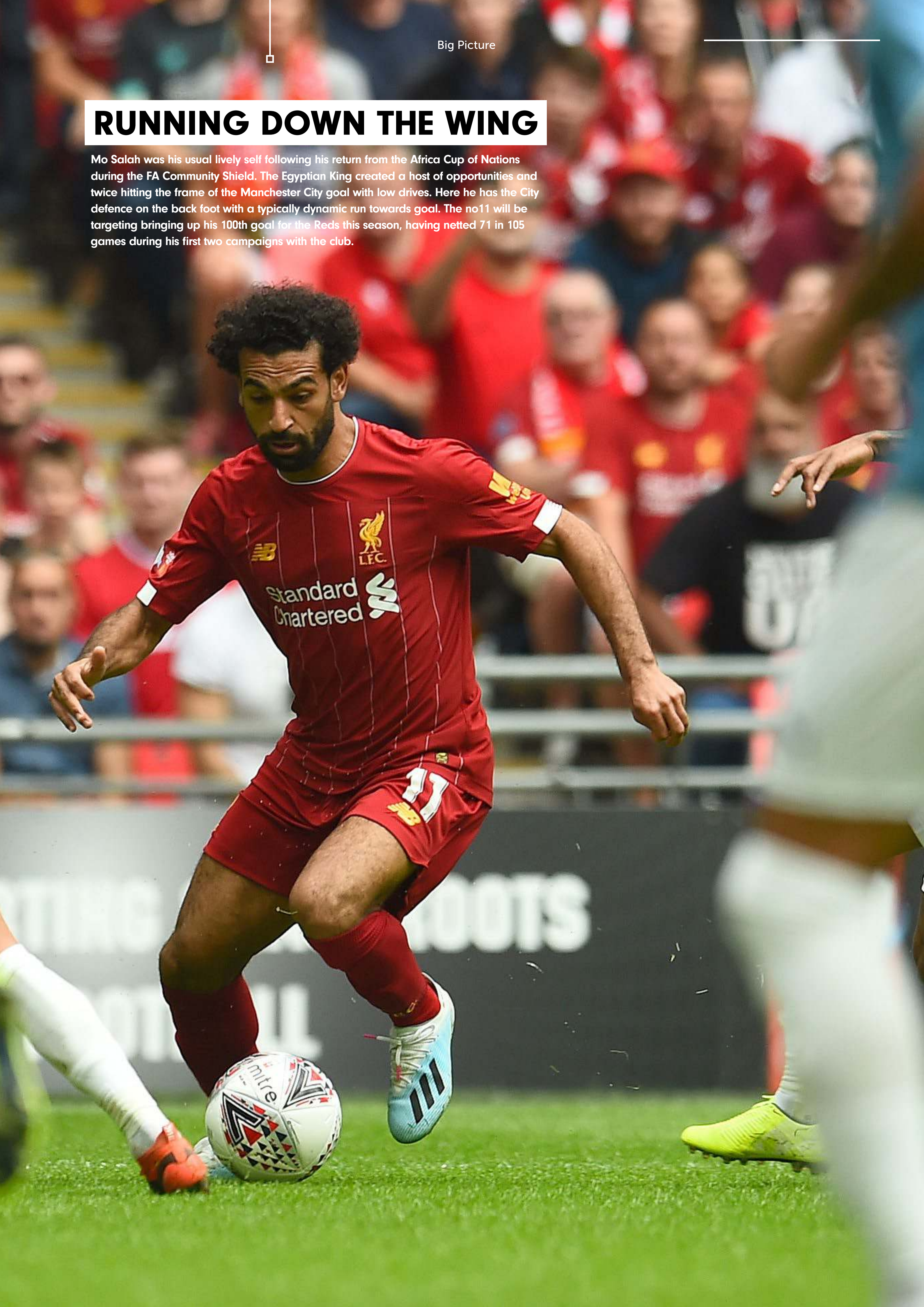


PERFECT MAT FINISH

The last time Joel Matip played competitively for Liverpool it was his assist that led to Divock Origi's Champions League winner in Madrid. The German centre-back found the net himself in the recent FA Community Shield, here celebrating with defensive partner Virgil van Dijk after they combined to score Liverpool's equaliser against Manchester City at Wembley.


WIJNALDUM
5
FIRMINO
9


5
OTAMENDI
30



RUNNING DOWN THE WING

Mo Salah was his usual lively self following his return from the Africa Cup of Nations during the FA Community Shield. The Egyptian King created a host of opportunities and twice hitting the frame of the Manchester City goal with low drives. Here he has the City defence on the back foot with a typically dynamic run towards goal. The no11 will be targeting bringing up his 100th goal for the Reds this season, having netted 71 in 105 games during his first two campaigns with the club.



BOSS TALK

Reds manager Jürgen Klopp shares a joke with midfield men James Milner and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain ahead of a training session at Melwood. "A new season is always about opportunity," says the boss. "I think this coming one presents the best kind of opportunity for all of us in the LFC fold. As the team we know we have the opportunity to be better than we were last season."


LFC
15

HENDERSON





Q&A

This season the Liverpool captain is demanding more from himself and his team-mates

After such an impressive 2018/19 campaign, how do you improve upon last season?
We're very proud of what we did last season. We were disappointed in the end with just missing out in the Premier League campaign, but we reacted in the right way in the Champions League and managed to finish that off and bring the trophy home.

There were a lot of positives to take from the whole season in the Premier League as well, the games that we won, especially towards the end of the season when I thought we showed great character.

Now we've got to show that again. We've got to take that into this new season and not really concentrate on comparing things to last season. It's about moving forward, it's about concentrating


14
L.F.C.
AXA
5
3
26

on each game. There were still a lot of games last year where we could have performed a lot better so we still want to improve as a team. We have done that for the last few years now and we want to continue that on.

After a season where you collected 97 points, we're talking about fine margins in terms of that improvement...
Perhaps, but I think there were a lot of times last season where we might have won a game but didn't play particularly well. Performance level is what we always focus on. As long as you're performing to a high level that is all you can ask for.

Football sometimes is a strange game and you don't always get what you deserve but you've just got to keep performing, working hard and try all you can to make that improvement.

Last season effectively became a title race between Liverpool and Manchester City. Do you envisage a repeat or do you think more clubs will be in the picture this season?
You never know what might happen in the season but, as happens every year, I feel as though other teams have improved in strength and they will get better. A lot of other things can happen as well so I definitely think there are a lot more teams other than just us and City who will be competing for the league.

If you look at some of the other teams, Spurs and Manchester United have made some big signings. Arsenal are going again, Chelsea are looking strong with Frank [Lampard] going in there so, yes, there are so many other big teams in there. It's a competitive league and teams who may have been lower down last year will also be competing to improve and get better as well. It's a difficult league and you always need to improve if you want to challenge.





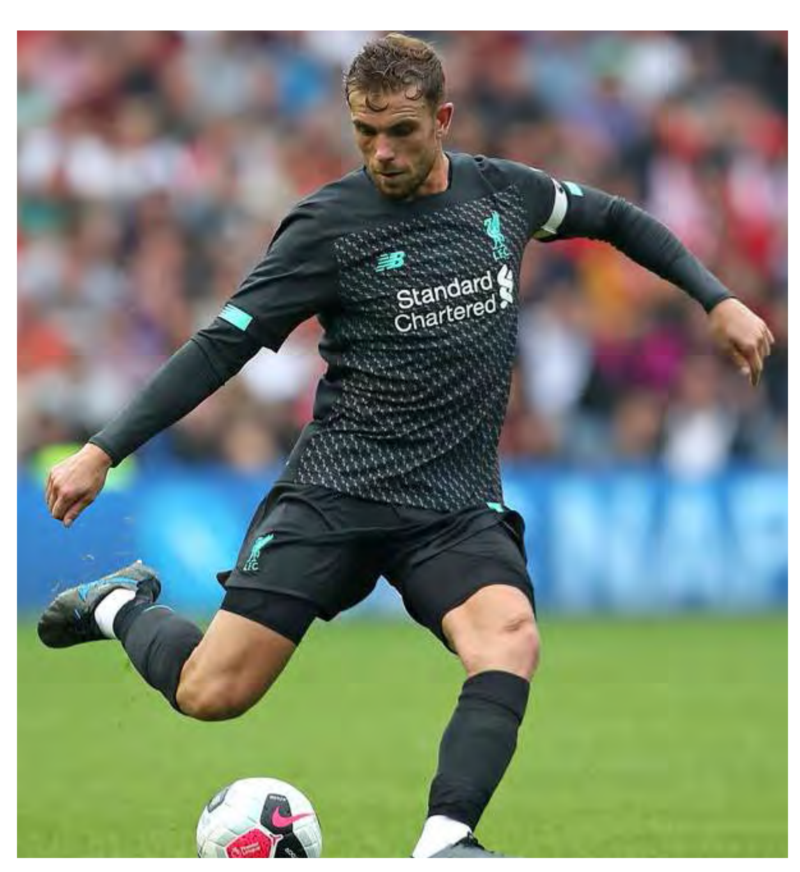
You have an early chance to get one over Chelsea in the UEFA Super Cup...
Yes, we treat every game seriously. We want to win every game. That's the way that we've been here for a long time now. We treat each game as it comes and we want to perform to the highest level that we're capable of doing whether that's in the Premier League, Champions League, FA Cup, League Cup, Super Cup...

Whatever competition it may be in, we want to compete and, as I say, our mindset is that we want to win every game.

The day after the FA Community Shield, goalkeeper Simon Mignolet moved to Club Brugge. He is someone you first played with at Sunderland back in 2010 and you will surely be sad to see him go...
Yes, definitely. I've been with Si for a long time now. He's a great lad, he's so professional and kept on coming in and working hard day in, day out even when he was not playing as often as he would have liked. But he was great to have around and always there for the lads when you needed him.

He's improved massively since he walked through the door at Sunderland. The level he's at now is the very top level. He's such a good goalkeeper and he worked really well with Ali last season as well. He'll definitely be a big miss for us but we wish him all the best for the future and I hope it all goes well for him.





Along with Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Rhian Brewster and Joe Gomez, it's been great to see your good friend Adam Lallana figuring regularly again during pre-season...

Yes, definitely. He's had a really tough year or so but he's worked really hard over the summer. He didn't really have a break. He did extra training to make sure he was ready for pre-season and then in pre-season, he looked really good.

He got a little bit of a dead-leg in one game which kept him out for a couple of days, but overall he's looked really sharp. I think when he came on in the FA Community Shield he looked really sharp in midfield and he's a big player for us.

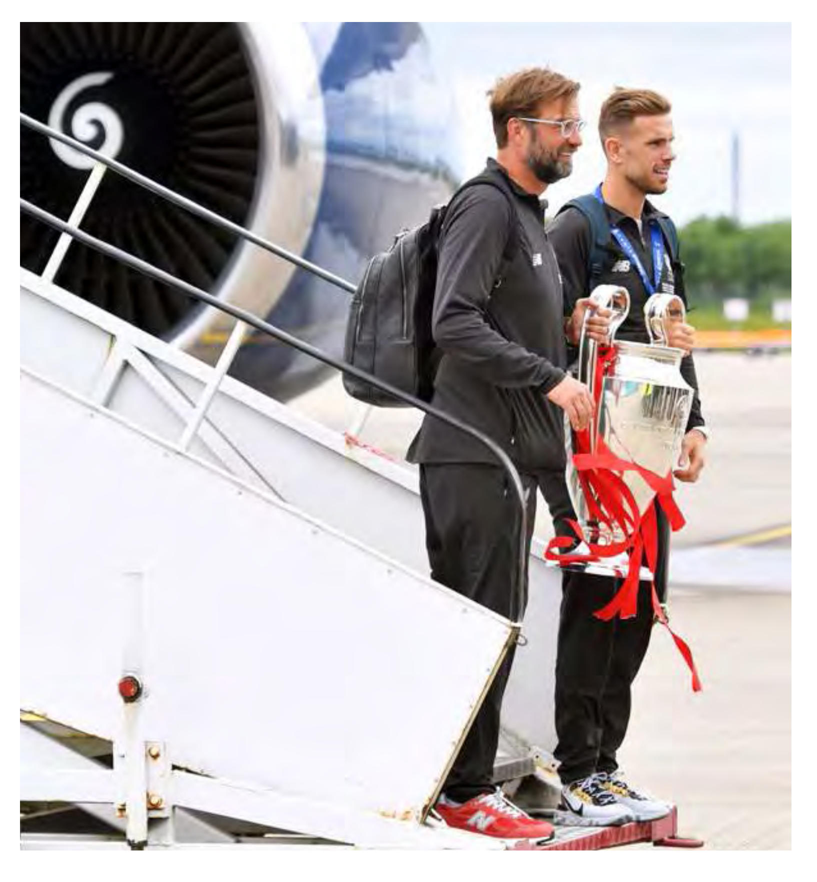
When he's fit and he's firing he's a fantastic player and I've no doubt that he will keep going because he's doing everything he can to make sure that he stays out on the grass.

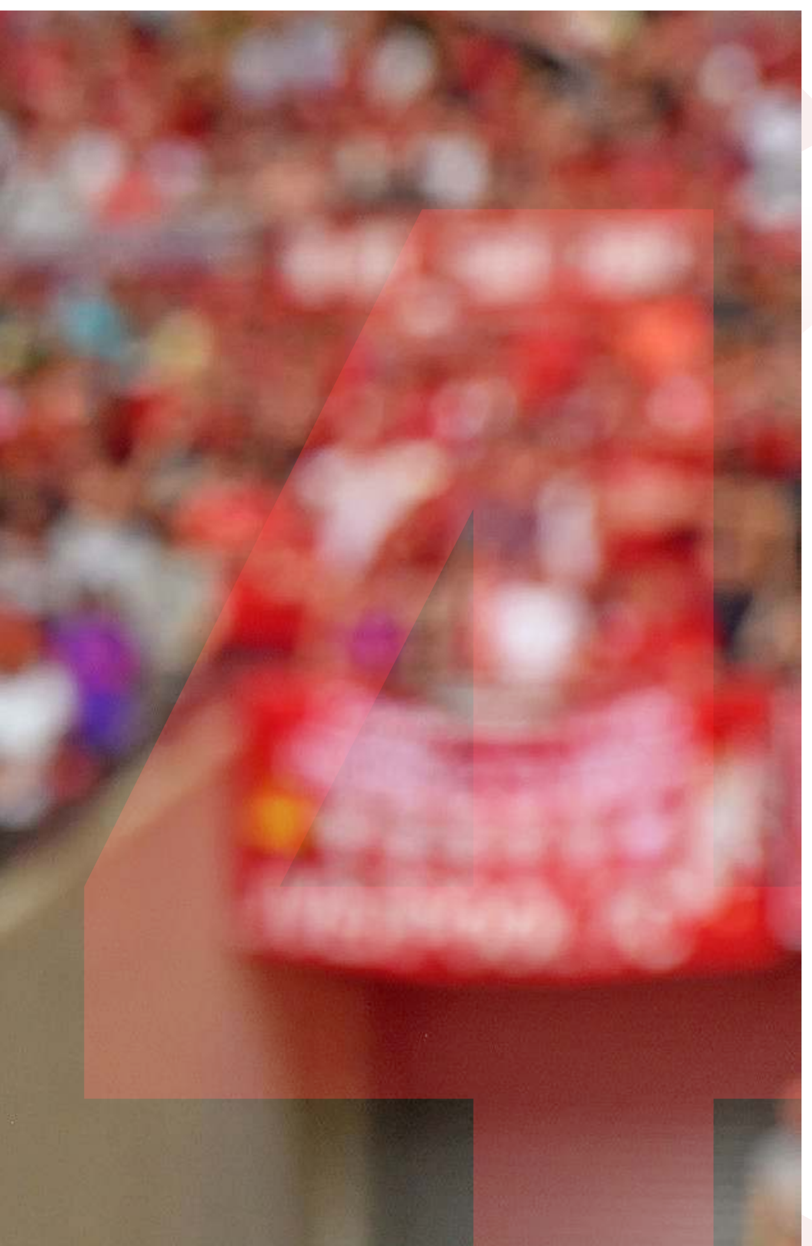
You kick-off the new Premier League season against Norwich City at Anfield...

We are expecting a tough game. They're new to the Premier League and we know that they will give everything. We've got to make sure that we're performing to the levels that we know that we can in that game and every game – just as we did second-half against City at Wembley – and if we do that then we'll cause teams a lot of problems.

How are you feeling fitness-wise?

I feel good. I think a lot of the lads feel really good. We worked hard in America and then went to France for a week, so we've had some good sessions and some good warm-up games for the season to come. We're feeling good and ready to go.





LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Last season, 2018/19, kicked off with Liverpool at home to West Ham and skipper Jordan Henderson revealing in his matchday programme notes that he'd returned later than most to pre-season training, following England's World Cup exploits in Russia, and was immediately struck by "just how focused" everyone in the first-team squad was.

"Last season was good but we want this one to be better," he wrote. Liverpool duly amassed 22 more points in the Premier League than the previous season, from from 75 to 97 while climbing two places in the table from fourth to second, and of course reached a second successive Champions League final with an altogether happier ending. Clearly the captain wasn't kidding about the team's ambitions.

In those same notes from August 2018 he identified on of the squad's best qualities as "the ability to block out unhelpful opinions and noise. The manager drills into us all the time that when it comes to opinions about football, his is the only one that matters; that we should only be interested in those who truly care about us – people who genuinely want Liverpool to be a success, such as our supporters.

"The rest is about embracing the positive pressure that comes from being at a club of Liverpool's stature."

If, as they say, 'the first trophy is the hardest', Reds fans could be in for lots more fun this season. Henderson, though, remains as professional, focused and humble as ever.

In his final matchday notes for 2018/19, for the visit of Wolves to Anfield last May, he began by acknowledging "the people who, over the course of a season, go above and beyond for us boys without ever really getting any spotlight themselves. Most of the lads have mentioned this to me, so these are the sentiments of the entire dressing-room.

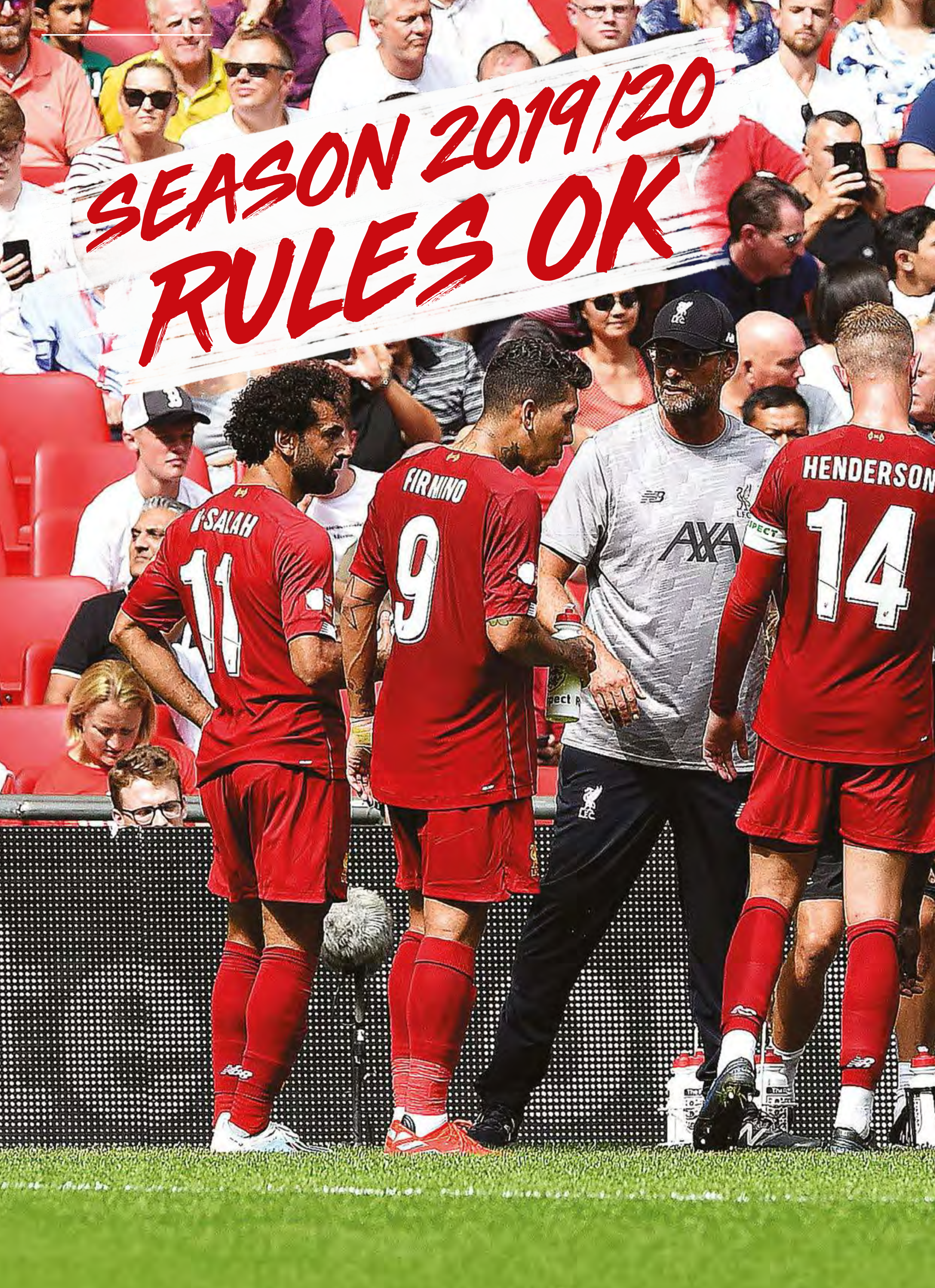
"As players we have the most unbelievable support network around us and without it we couldn't do what we do. It starts at home with our families and our closest friends... In the workplace the staff at Melwood are simply world-class... And of course [there are] the supporters. What they do for us is more than just the special moments, it's always there...

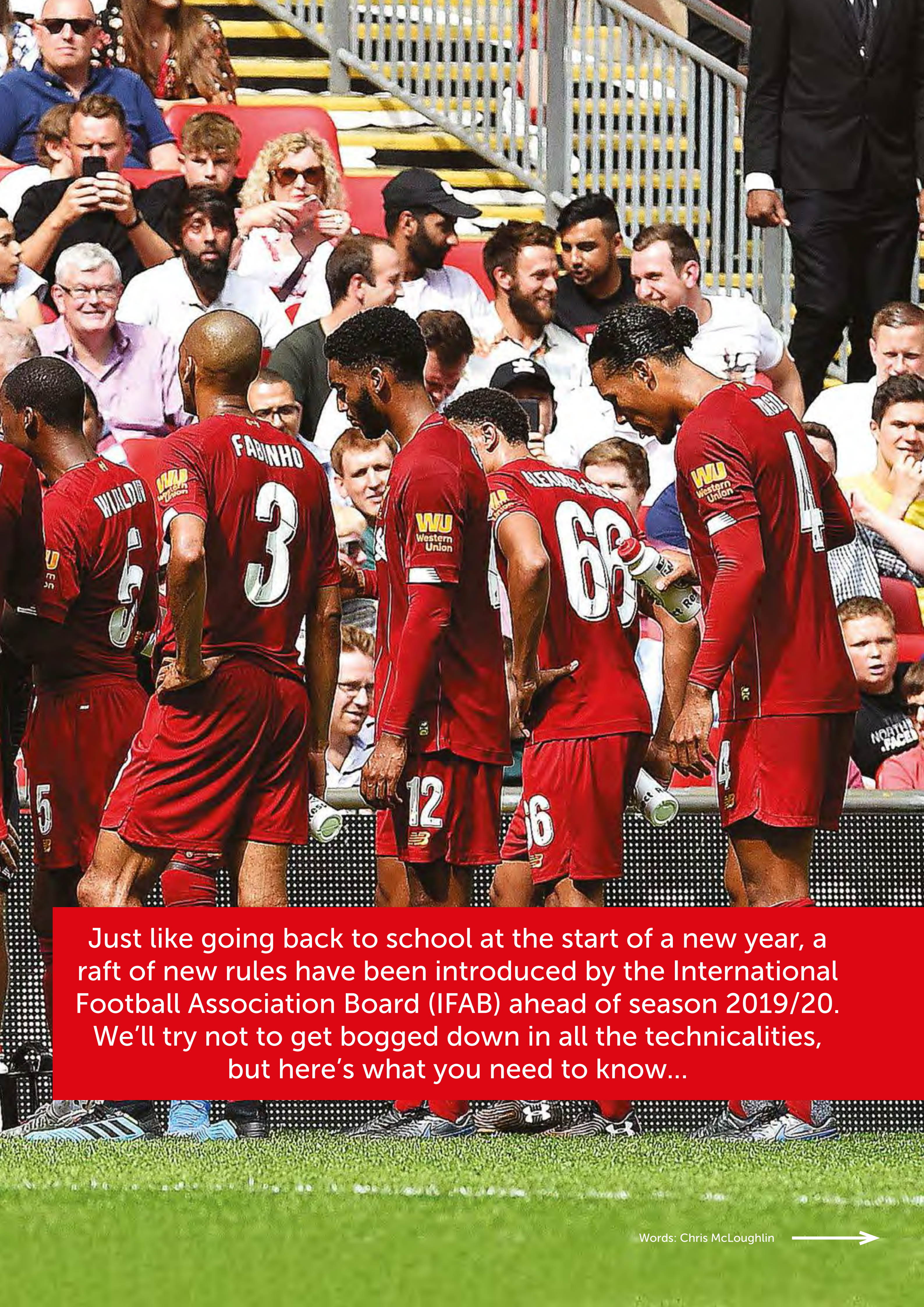
"That's us. That's this team. Win together, lose together, celebrate together and cry together. I couldn't feel more privileged and blessed to be part of this."

Hendo's 11 Premier League seasons in numbers...

310 appearances
26 goals
41 assists
156 wins
323 shots
15,991 passes
51.58 passes per match
40 big chances created
732 crosses
121 through-balls
1,059 accurate long-balls

SEASON 2019/20 RULES OK





Just like going back to school at the start of a new year, a raft of new rules have been introduced by the International Football Association Board (IFAB) ahead of season 2019/20. We'll try not to get bogged down in all the technicalities, but here's what you need to know...

Words: Chris McLoughlin

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ALL KICKING OFF

The kick-off has already changed in recent years with a player now permitted to play the ball backwards. Now the coin-toss has flipping well changed too. If Jordan Henderson wins the toss he can now opt to kick off whereas previously the coin-toss winner could only select which end to play towards first.

It could help a team make a quick start, but then given Naby Keita scored the quickest Premier League goal ever seen at Anfield just 15 seconds after Huddersfield kicked off last season we suspect Liverpool captain Hendo will continue to choose to kick towards the Anfield Road end first when getting the heads-up on his rival skipper.

DROPPED BALLS

Old-school contested dropped-balls are a thing of the past. RIP, a kick in the shins. Instead, the team that touched the ball last will receive possession from a dropped-ball with the nearest opponent having to stand at least 4.5m away...unless a dropped-ball is awarded in the penalty area. In that instance the goalkeeper automatically gets possession. Well, it is his area.





The new goal-kick rule will affect the Ox and co

WALL CHANGE

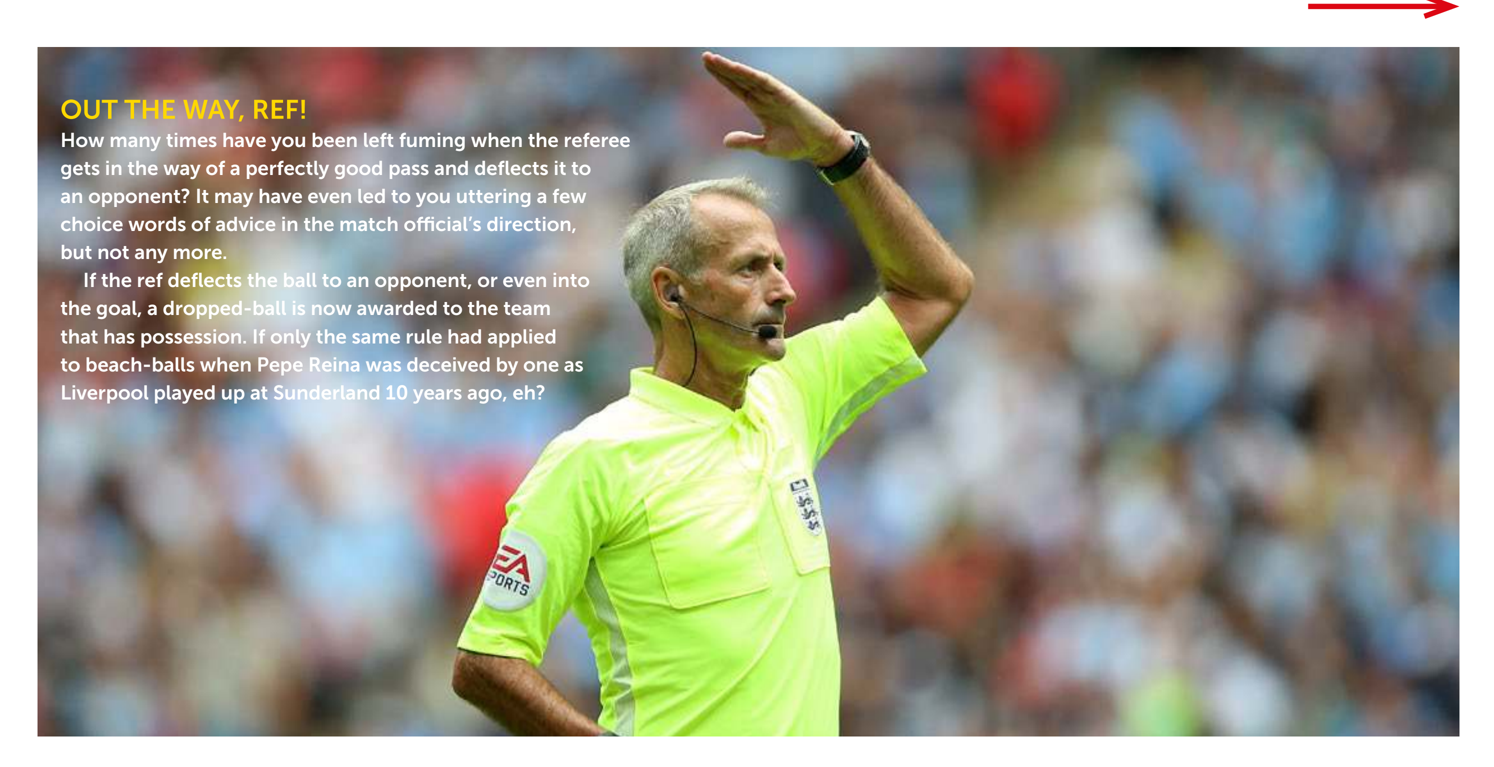
The days when a defensive wall trying to block a free-kick would have a couple of attackers on the end trying to block a goalkeeper's vision are over. If a defensive wall contains three or more players the nearest attacker can't stand within a metre of them and woe betide them if they enter that exclusion-zone as an indirect free-kick will be awarded. Free-kicks taken in your own penalty-area don't have to leave the box before anyone else can touch the ball now, either, which brings us to goal-kicks...

THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

As you'll have seen during the Community Shield between Liverpool and Manchester City, the ball no longer has to leave the penalty-area before it can be played again following a goal-kick.

However, the IFAB have already had to clarify the rule to say attacking players must remain outside the penalty-area until the goal-kick is taken unless it is taken so quickly that they didn't have time to evacuate the area. In that instance the player can then attempt to intercept the ball or challenge for it under the 'quick free-kick principle', but it's up to the ref to decide if he stayed in the penalty-area deliberately or not.

If any rules are broken, the goal-kick is retaken, but it could also mean a goalkeeper scoops a goal-kick to a defender to head back into his arms to waste a bit of time before hitting it long. Even so, this rule-change might just suit Liverpool's pressing game and ability to play it out from the back, too.



OUT THE WAY, REF!

How many times have you been left fuming when the referee gets in the way of a perfectly good pass and deflects it to an opponent? It may have even led to you uttering a few choice words of advice in the match official's direction, but not any more.

If the ref deflects the ball to an opponent, or even into the goal, a dropped-ball is now awarded to the team that has possession. If only the same rule had applied to beach-balls when Pepe Reina was deceived by one as Liverpool played up at Sunderland 10 years ago, eh?

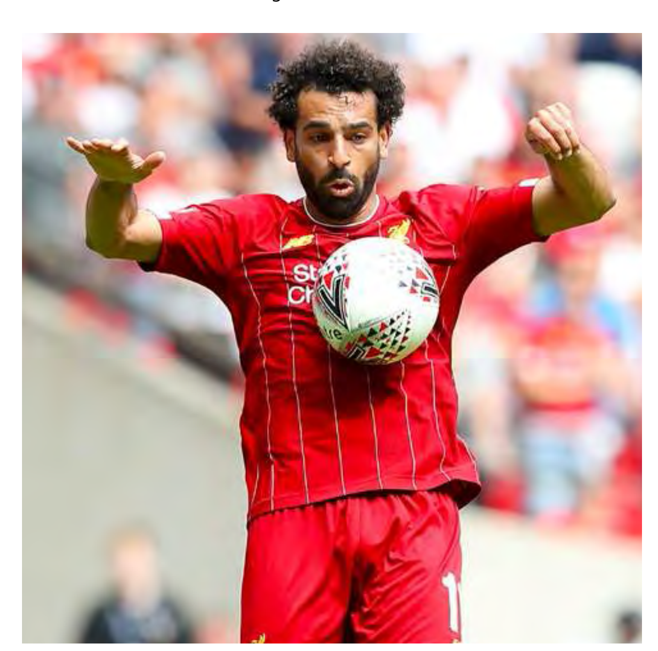
Hey, Ali – leave that post alone!

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Firstly, if a team's penalty-taker gets injured when winning a penalty they can now be treated on the pitch before taking the spot-kick. Things have got tougher for goalies, though.

Like every other keeper, Alisson is no longer allowed to touch any part of the goal-frame, move, stand behind the line and must have at least one foot on or in line with the goal-line when the penalty-kick is taken, which wouldn't have helped Jerzy Dudek in Istanbul!

You can expect VAR to review all those conditions have been met whenever a penalty is saved, the aim being to give attacking players a better opportunity to score. One for the goalkeepers union to discuss at their next meeting then.



ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN

The most confusing, complex and contentious changes of the lot surround handball. And it takes some explaining. In short, but not as short as the shorts Diego Maradona used to wear in the 1980s, deliberate handball is still an offence, but accidental handball has been split into two categories with eight different scenarios.

A free-kick or penalty is awarded for accidental handball if:

• the ball goes into the goal.
• a player gains possession by using their arm then scores or creates a goal.
• the ball touches their hand/arm after they've made their body 'unnaturally bigger' a la Moussa Sissoko blocking Sadio Mane's cross in the Champions League final in Madrid.
• the ball touches a player's hand/arm when it is above their shoulder...unless they deliberately played the ball and it subsequently accidentally hits their hand/arm.

However, a free-kick or penalty is not awarded for accidental handball if:

• the ball touches their hand/arm directly from their own body or the body of another player who is nearby.
• the ball touches their hand/arm if they've not made their body 'unnaturally bigger'.
• a player is falling and the ball touches their hand/arm when it is between their body and the ground to support their body...unless they've extended the arm to make their body unnaturally bigger.
• if the goalkeeper attempts to clear the ball from a throw-in or pass by a team-mate and the clearance strikes a hand/arm. They can then pick the ball up.

Told you it was complicated. Still with us? Hello? Anybody looking forward to Carra and Gary Neville talking about unnatural silhouettes on the telly? They'll be talking about managers getting booked too...

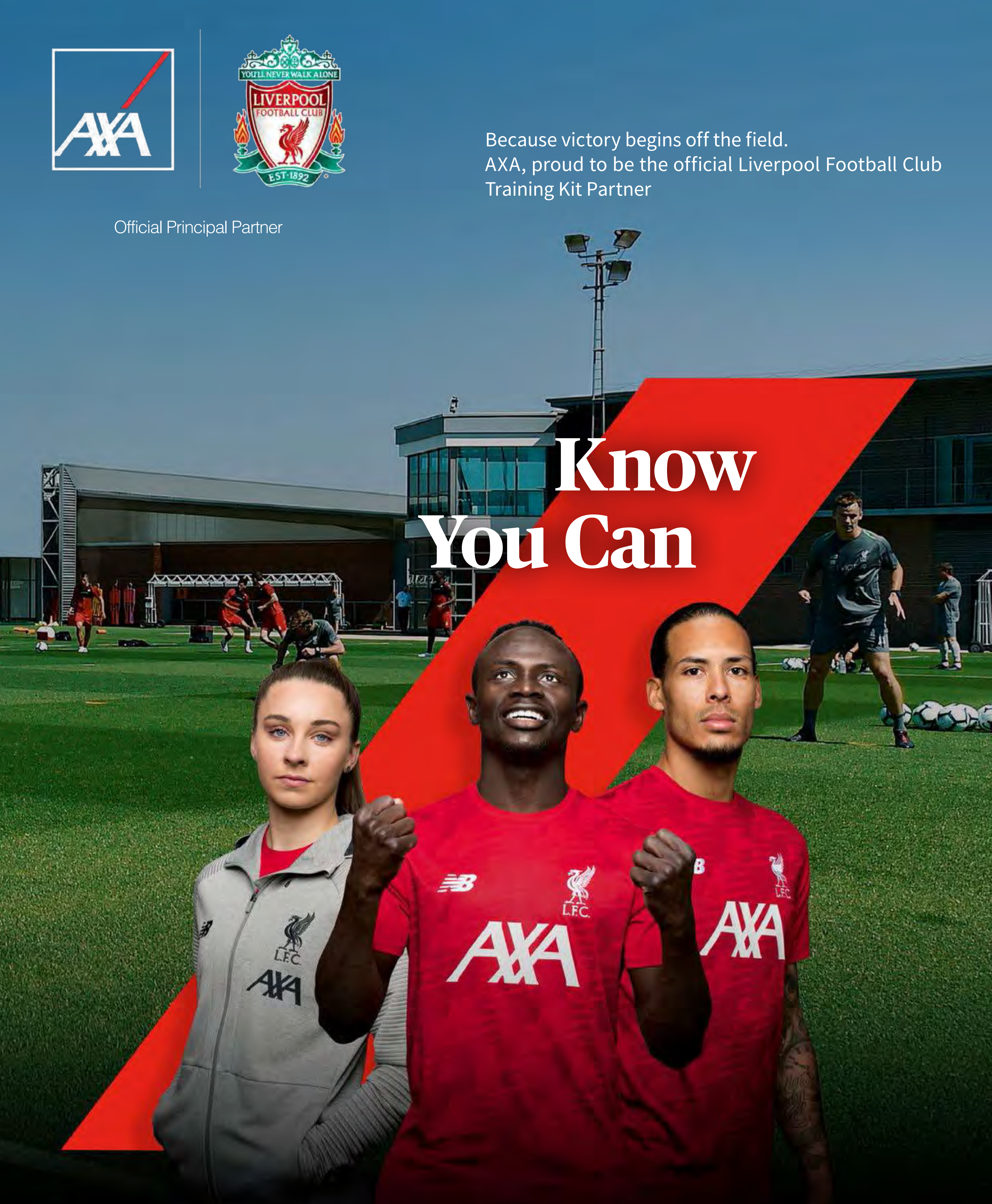


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BOSS BOOKINGS

Pep Guardiola was shown a yellow card in the Community Shield at Wembley for remonstrating with the fourth official and four of them during a season is a one-game ban, eight a two-game ban etc. Any team official in the technical area can be booked or sent off, but if an offence is committed by an unidentified offender the team's manager or coach will be booked or sent off, essentially meaning Jürgen Klopp will take the hit if any of his staff say something out of place but aren't identified for it.

Speaking of bookings, a ref no longer has to hold the game up to make one. He can allow a free-kick to quickly be taken then issue a yellow card at the next stoppage if he wants to, preventing wily players from trying to slow a game down when they desperately need to by deliberately getting cautioned.



HOOKED

When a player is being substituted they must now leave the field at the closest point to the touchline instead of wandering over to the halfway-line in front of the technical zone at their own convenience. So as far as Anfield is concerned, expect visiting players being given the hook, when trying to run the clock down, to be hanging around in the centre-circle instead of one yard from the Sir Kenny Dalglish Stand touchline this season to eke a few more seconds out. Can't imagine too many opponents will want to walk off in the scoreboard corner and walk the length of the Kop to get back to their bench, though!

KEEP YER SHIRT ON

Sorry Bobby Firmino, but it's still a yellow card if you take your shirt off to celebrate so we won't get to see that Champions League trophy tattoo on your back after scoring. But there has been an addition to the rule. An 'illegal' celebration will still be deemed a bookable offence even if VAR disallows the goal. Talk about a double-whammy!

Speaking of VAR, the rules are essentially the same as last season, in case you're wondering, but decisions on when to go to the video ref and VAR rulings will be interpreted differently in the Premier League and Champions League. So what we're saying is anything could happen but then as you already know, in football it usually does...

"ALISSON CAN BE THE BEST IN THE WORLD"



Words: Chris McLoughlin

So says former Reds keeper Bruce Grobbelaar, who believes that the current LFC no1 has everything in his locker to reach the very top





Bruce back in the day and now (right)

A little under 12 months ago Bruce Grobbelaar launched his autobiography *A Life In The Jungle*, with a media event at the This Is Anfield Hotel on Anfield Road. He was asked by journalists about his book, of course, but another line of questioning was inevitable: what do you think of Alisson Becker?

The Brazilian goalkeeper had been signed by Jürgen Klopp from AS Roma a couple months earlier and on the night of Grobbelaar's book launch was six games into his Liverpool career, having made his Champions League debut for the Reds against PSG at Anfield earlier that week.

He was already starting to look the part, but a goal-costing error during the 2-1 win at Leicester City meant the jury was still out, especially given the reported size of the transfer fee.

Grobbelaar made 628 appearances and kept 268 clean-sheets for LFC between 1981 and 1994 – only Ray Clemence has kept more – so his opinion on Alisson was always going to be sought after. But Bruce was wise to the question. "I'll give my verdict later," he replied. "You can't make judgements at this stage. He's still adjusting and settling in."

A year later it's fair to say that Alisson well and truly settled in. He ended his first season as Liverpool goalkeeper by winning the Premier League Golden Glove, keeping 21 clean-sheets in 38 games – a new club record in the PL era.

He also kept the most clean-sheets in the Champions League and made a record eight saves against Tottenham in the final in Madrid, and completed a hat-trick of awards when keeping the most clean-sheets as Brazil won the Copa America.

The only goal he conceded during the whole tournament in South America was a penalty against Peru in the final, meaning that during the 62 games Alisson played for club and country in season 2018/19 he kept 36 clean-sheets and only conceded 36 goals.

So, having had 12 months to assess Liverpool's 'new' number one, having now taken over the no1 shirt that Grobbelaar used to wear, what is Brucie's considered verdict on Alisson?

"For a first year at Liverpool he had an absolutely fantastic season," he says. "To win the Golden Glove in the Premier League and Champions League was quite remarkable, but he won the Copa America Golden Glove as well. So in his first year at Liverpool he's won Golden Gloves for being the best goalkeeper in South America, Europe and the best goalkeeper in the Premier League.

"He only let in one goal in the Copa America, which is brilliant, and over here he proved himself to now possibly be the best keeper in Europe and probably the world."

It's quite a statement from Grobbelaar, who won 13 major honours as Liverpool goalkeeper, but it isn't something he dwells upon. The Zimbabwean played for a Reds during an era when what's to come next, rather than what has just gone, was the only focus. It was epitomised by the way the late, great Ronnie Moran used to dish out league winners' medals from a cardboard box in the dressing-room, telling the players to "take one if you think you deserve one" and to start thinking about next season.

Grobbelaar, now 61, believes the true test of Alisson is to follow up his exceptional first season at Anfield by doing it all over again, but that he needs the help of others for it to happen.




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"Playing in your first season in England is difficult. You've got to learn the language, which he has, and then he had to learn Scouse! He has won those accolades, but the big thing now is to follow it through during the new season because that's the mark of a true champion.

"I believe he can do it. I believe he's got the shoulders to handle the expectation, but only time will tell as it's not just Alisson, per se, but those around him that can make him the best.

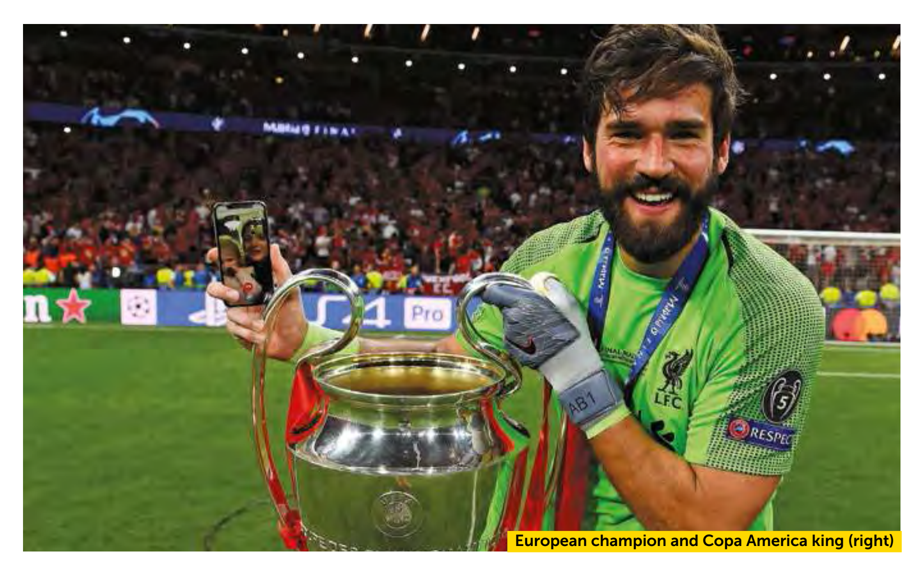
"I'm talking about everything when I say that – right down to the coaching staff, the fitness coach and the video analyst. Those are the people that can make him the best in the world. I know he's got the character to shrug off anything that isn't up to his standard and put in the extra work. That's the mark of a true best-in-the-world goalkeeper."

After winning both the Champions League and Copa America some observers tipped Alisson to make the shortlist of 10 for the 2019 Balon d'Or. Yet when the names were revealed, his was missing, although Anfield team-mates Virgil van Dijk, Mo Salah and Sadio Mane remain in contention for the prestigious honour which is voted for by 176 sports journalists from 176 different countries.

The only goalkeeper to ever win the Balon d'Or was legendary Russian goalie Lev Yashin all the way back in 1963, so I ask Grobbelaar if he thinks it's impossible for a goalkeeper to ever win it again?

"I don't think it's impossible. Had Alisson and Liverpool won the league I think his name would have been on the shortlist for sure. The Balon d'Or trophy is about winners and who has won what.

"We've got Virgil van Dijk as one of the favourites. Will Van Dijk win it? I hope he does, but I'm going to say there is a very slim chance of that happening because Lionel Messi won the Spanish





European champion and Copa America king (right)

league again and scored over 50 goals.

"The Balon d'Or is voted for by journalists around the world. Do they know the English league more than the Spanish league? I don't know, but had Liverpool won the league I am sure Alisson would have been nominated."

Alisson himself isn't focused on winning individual honours. Indeed, he sees the three Golden Glove awards that he picked up last season as recognition for those who work with him on the training ground on a daily basis.

"My first goal is always to win with the team, to win for the club," he's told the club's official website. "Only after that comes the individual trophies. I am happy but they were not just my trophies – they were the trophies for the other goalkeepers who work really, really hard on the pitch with me, with John [Achterberg] and Jack [Robinson] and with [Claudio] Taffarel at the national team, and with my other team-mates also.

"To win the Copa America, it's a special title – as is the Champions League – so it was an important title for me, for the nation. For Brazil, it's been a long time since we won it – the last time was 2007, if I am not mistaken – so it was important for us.

"To win two titles, two big titles, during the season was great for me. I hope this season – and I will work this season – to make it more."

At the age of 26 there is plenty of time for Alisson to become even better and Grobbelaar believes there are three areas where the former Roma keeper can develop his game further.



"In this day-and-age goalkeepers have to improve with the ball at their feet, with the reading of the game and their communication. That is how Alisson can improve and part of that is learning more about the players around him. He needs to know what his defenders' strengths are and what their weaknesses are.

"For instance, he knows what Van Dijk can do. He knows he won't let anybody past him because it is a fact that nobody went past him last season. But what about the other centre-half Van Dijk is playing with? That's where concentration and communication is vital, because it isn't always the same defender playing alongside Van Dijk.

"We've got fantastic full-backs in Alexander-Arnold and Robertson and I'm sure they will be there for a long time to come, but the question is who is going to be the second centre-half to Van Dijk?

"We've got Gomez, Lovren and Matip, but also now young Sepp van den Berg. There's also young Phillips, who I think is an absolute diamond of a defender, coming through, so there are quite a few in contention and I'm excited to see who can make that position their own.

"Whoever it is, a settled defence helps a goalkeeper massively. If you get a settled defence you know their characteristics and where their strengths and weaknesses are, which is important because as a goalkeeper you rely on your defenders.

"In other words, the more settled the defence is, the better Alisson Becker will be."



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SO LONG SIMON

Afer six seasons with Liverpool the 31-year-old goalkeeper is embarking upon a new adventure with FC Bruges, and signs off like this: "It's been a great ride. There have been ups, downs and everything in-between, but I'll always look back on my time at Anfield with fondness. I have no regrets – I've given my all, and I've always done my best to wear the shirt with pride, and to represent the club with dignity and professionalism. Once part of the family, always part of the family. Deep inside I'll always be a Red. Thanks for the memories Liverpool, and good luck for the future."


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ADRIAN

One great guy leaves, another arrives – and he's here to learn from first-choice goalkeeper Alisson and push him all the way too

Within hours of Liverpool announcing the departure of Simon Mignolet, the Reds confirmed the arrival of former West Ham United goalkeeper Adrian. The Spaniard has plenty of Premier League experience, having made 125 appearances for the Hammers between 2013 and 2019.

He joined the East London club six years ago after breaking into the Real Betis first team in his hometown of Seville, twelve months earlier. Upon the announcement of his Anfield move, Betis tweeted from their official account: "Hey @LFC what a signing you've made! He's a superb keeper and one of the nicest guys in world football @AdriSanMiguel we're proud of you. All the best, mate!"

The 32-year-old, who will wear the no13 shirt here, says: "It's a great step in my career right now, after six good seasons at West Ham. It's a good challenge, a big challenge for me to face, challenging with big players here."

Adrian is also looking forward to working with Alisson Becker and the club's other goalies at Melwood this season. "He's a great keeper, he's doing very well. His first season with Liverpool was magnificent. I come here to have a competition with him – a positive competition that helps us to improve.

"The competition makes us better and I'm looking forward to working with him and the goalkeeping staff. I'm very ambitious. I come here to try to win everything, to try to push Ali from the first minute and to make us better.

"We have many competitions ahead, so we're going to fight for it and try to get them."



ROBERTSON

Two sensational seasons into his Liverpool career and Andy regularly gets talked about as the best left-back in the business. "But," he says, "I still feel I can improve a lot more. Last season was big for me because there was a bit more expectation at the start. I feel I managed to deal with that. This season there'll probably be even more, but I just look to add to it, keep contributing to the team, like the manager and coaching staff want me to do."

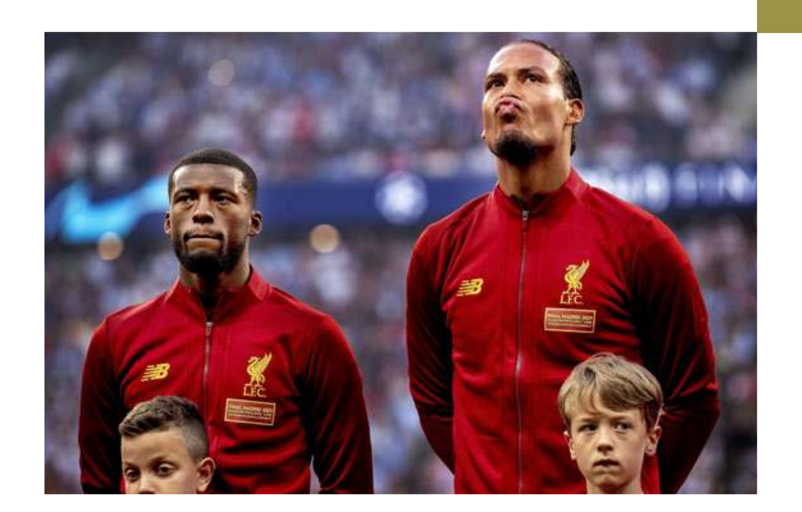


ALEXANDER-ARNOLD

Trent turns 21 on Monday 7 October 2019, the week commencing the second international break of the Premier League season. All being well, he'll be celebrating his birthday with another England call-up – this time on European Championship qualifying duty – with the Reds on song in all competitions at home.

VIRGIL 4

Our number four on Liverpool FC's family feeling, the power of positivity, and quite possibly the meaning of life



KEEP IT IN PERSPECTIVE

I like to think of myself as someone who knows there are so many other things in life that are more important than football.

Obviously football is something that I love to do and I dreamt of becoming a professional footballer when I was younger, and I will always give everything from the first whistle until the end.

Criticism is part of the game but it doesn't bother me anymore. I know exactly what I can do better, what I do wrong and what I do well. The people around me will tell me and I will definitely accept it. But in life there are so many other things that are more important and you have to think that way, too.

These days with social-media everyone has their opinion. You can't change that, but it won't bother me.



EXPRESS YOURSELF

I always like to give my opinion. I don't like to be quiet or keep my opinion to myself. I think it's good to say what you think, even if people occasionally might not like it.

It's just good to be yourself and I have definitely been like that since I was 18 or 19 and made the step to Groningen in Holland.

It's just the way I am. I like to express myself and hopefully it's in a good way.

NEVER GIVE UP

When I was 16 or 17 I was actually smaller than my little brother [Jordan]. Then over that summer I got a growth spurt. It was crazy. I've said before in other interviews, I grew about 15 to 17 centimetres in two-and-a-half months. Straightaway I had problems with both of my knees and I was injured for six weeks. But after that everything started to click a little bit more, I started to feel better and progress. It's obviously a good thing for young players to never give up, to keep going and believing in yourself.



RONALDINHO WAS THE MAN

Every top player had my respect, but I think as a youngster I looked at Ronaldinho from Brazil. He was probably my hero.

He was just someone who enjoyed football, at least that's how he showed it – always smiling with the tricks and the 'no-looks'! I had the white-and-gold futsal boots too. I would sometimes wear them to school and try to recreate his tricks. I think if you asked a lot of boys of my generation they would definitely say Ronaldinho because he was a joy to watch.





NBA ROCKS

In terms of other sports I am a big fan of Kyrie Irving who plays basketball for the Brooklyn Nets. I like the way he approaches the game, The feeling he helps generate on game-day is just great. Sometimes basketball games in the United States are just like a show and obviously you see a lot of greatness as well with the fantastic players they have in the NBA.

Football was always something that I could do a little bit better! I played on the street when I was young and that helps me understand how strikers think when they come up against you one-against-one.

THINK ON YOUR FEET

People have asked me about the incident in the Premier League game against Tottenham at Anfield when Heung-Min Son and Moussa Sissoko counter-attacked on us.

The ball came to Son, who I was marking, and he laid it off to Sissoko who was running towards me. I knew that Son was behind me and I also know that Son is a great finisher – to the left and right. You have to think in a split-second and I could have done a little bit better to block the shot [by Sissoko] to be honest. If he'd scored, we would've been talking about those kind of things instead. I tried to limit the options that he had and that's something I always keep in mind when I defend. Sometimes you need a bit of luck, too, and it worked out that time. But you also have to try to make the right decision.

Andy Robertson did something similar in the game against Barcelona so he should get a lot of credit for that as well. It's something that defenders learn to deal with in two-v-ones – to try to give the opponent the worst option.

MAKE THE STRIKER DECIDE

The game has changed over the years. For instance, slide-tackling is something that I prefer not to do. I'd rather let the striker think that he has to make a decision instead of giving him the decision.

It's difficult to explain but if you step in, you are already making his decision as to what to do, whereas if you hold him off and give him something to think about, it's always more difficult for the striker.

That's something that is definitely on my mind, something that I try to apply to how I defend. It has been going pretty well so hopefully I can just keep going.

As a kid on the streets I played as an attacker, so I know you don't like to be facing anyone where you have to make a decision. Strikers would love you to give them the opportunity to get past you. If you don't and you make it a bit more difficult, then they have to think and so on. Obviously it doesn't work every time, but it worked pretty well last season.



ALWAYS AIM HIGHER

I can still do better. Obviously I felt great last season, I felt fit and that's the most important thing: to keep playing as many games as possible as consistently as possible and never to really drop your level; to help the team to get wins and not to concede goals. It was a really long season but after the Nations League I took a break to charge myself back up.

I think I can get better in everything. I am a human being and I make mistakes like everyone else, so there is always room to improve. As with the best players in the world, I want to get the maximum out of myself and I have the feeling that there is more to come and more to improve.

As a centre-back you grow a lot with experience and knowing how to deal with certain situations. I'm just happy to play at such a high level with these kind of players. If you look at our squad, the quality that we have throughout the whole team and on the bench, the level of training and the standard that we set in the games, it has been outstanding. It's just a joy to play with these guys for Liverpool and I'm very proud to be wearing the shirt.

STRESS IS JUST A WORD

When I go home, then it is totally family-time. Life is too short to be stressing! I just enjoy my time with my family, with my wife and kids, and that's life.

Before games I play Ultimate Team on FIFA so I have my own side. Am I in it? Yes! I also have Trent Alexander-Arnold and Alisson! I have Messi, Henrik Larsson, Clarence Seedorf and Diego Maradona, too. Sometimes I get beaten, though, so I need to improve! I would say Trent is maybe my best player because he is young and represents the next generation.

WORK HARD, ENJOY THE RIDE

The fact that I have always worked for every step that I have made makes me proud.

When I was in Holland I didn't get a contract from my parent club Willem II, the club where I'd played ten years in the Academy, wanted to make my debut for, wanted to play for. That was my mindset at the time, playing there for the rest of my career, because that's how you think when you're young and working towards the first-team.

I went to FC Groningen, started in the Under-23s, worked my way up to the first-team, made my debut, became a regular and was working for the next step to go to one of the big clubs in Holland. No-one took a gamble on me and so I went to Celtic, a fantastic club with amazing fans. We played in the Champions League and the Europa League and I developed a lot as a player. I got to know a lot of people who are still great friends.

Then I went to Southampton, playing in the Premier League. Under Ronald Koeman we had a fantastic team with Victor Wanyama, Jose Fonte, Ryan Bertrand, Graziano Pelle, Dusan Tadic and, of course, Sadio.

After that, I made the step to Liverpool and I'm proud of the way I've reached where I am right now. That's something also for younger players to take note of: never give up and enjoy every bit of it.





THE ORANJE ARMBAND

The most important thing as a young Dutch player is to have a desire to be part of the Netherlands national team.

As a really young player you look more at the strikers and goals and I totally understand because it's more attractive. You look differently at football at that point and you want to see how strikers score and celebrate, you want to be the kind of player who scores goals and makes crazy tricks and flicks and so on. But I've always felt the most important thing is that I wanted to be part of the national team.

Right now, to be the captain of my country is unbelievable. I am very proud and I would never take it for granted. Hopefully we can achieve good things.

FAMILY FIRST

Liverpool can beat any team in the world on our day. I wouldn't say we are the best team in the world – we had a great season but I think the best teams in the world do it for many years. Hopefully our success is something for us to build on and to grow as a group.

We have a fantastic squad of players, a great age-group as well and obviously a great manager and staff. It's a great time to be a Liverpool fan or player and hopefully we can build on all of this.

When I think over my career, I have played for Celtic who are a family club like Liverpool, where the fans really care about you and will always be there no matter what. Liverpool has exactly the same feeling and Southampton was similar, too. I had the same feeling at the clubs I played for in Holland, it's just something that I like.

I would like to win more trophies with this group, keep working hard and give everything for the club. The fans are there for us, no matter what, and the only thing we can do is give everything on the pitch and show that we really want to fight for this club. That mentality is definitely within our dressing-room.



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LOVREN

The lion-hearted Croatian centre-half clocked up 18 appearances for Liverpool last season, bringing his overall LFC total to 170 over five seasons – of his team-mates only Jordan Henderson (with 324 games), Simon Mignolet (204), Roberto Firmino (192) and James Milner (177) have represented the Reds more times.



MATIP

It took 98 matches for Joel to get his first assist as a Liverpool player. It was worth waiting for: a sublime drop-touch in the Spurs area for Divock Origi to control, shoot and seal the Champions League win in Madrid. The quietly-confident German-born centre-half commences his fourth season as a Red by celebrating his 28th birthday the day before the Premier League opener against Norwich City.

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GOMEZ

"Committed." That's the word central defender Joe picks to sum up this Reds first-team squad. "Look at the amount of contracts that have been signed in the last 12 months, look at the age of the team," adds the 22-year-old. "We're here to stay. If you look in all the different departments, the quality is there and the squad has a good balance too."



VAN DEN BERG

It took a little while for his international clearance to come through, but Sepp was finally able to join up with his new manager and team-mates on the pre-season tour. Jürgen Klopp says of the young Dutch defender: "It's not often a player stands in front of me and they're taller than me! Especially when they are 17 and still growing. He's an outstanding talent."


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FABINHO

Towards the end of last year he started getting a run in the side; that he never looked back is something of an understatement

Three days after the 2018 Champions League final it suddenly felt a whole lot better if you were a Liverpool fan. Out went dejection after the defeat to Real Madrid; in came delight in the shape of new signing Fabio Henrique Tavares, or Fabinho for short. Here, in his own words, is why it happened so fast...

"After five seasons at Monaco I knew it was the right time to leave, to seek new challenges, to look for a step-up in my career, and I had no doubt that I wanted to come to Liverpool. So much so that when the transfer-window opened, the deal was already made official as I knew that I truly wanted to come here."

Twelve months on, that decision was most consummately vindicated at the end of the 2019 Champions League final. "When the referee blew the final whistle," recalls the 25-year-old Brazilian, "I really wanted to cry. I knelt down on the pitch, but my team-mates came straight over to hug me. They piled on top of me, so I started to celebrate with them and the fans as well.

"I was just hugging everyone around me because it was a wonderful feeling of 'job done' and we were the champions. It was a dream, we didn't want the day to ever end. It was unforgettable."

Time and patience are rare commodities in the modern game, but for the first few months of last season both were afforded to Fabinho by those who recognised his class and exciting potential.

"I knew that the move would require me to adapt," he continues. "To adapt to a new training method, to adapt to a new league, to adapt to a new country which is completely different from the one I was used to.

"In the beginning I constantly looked to learn from my coaches and the players who had been playing here longer. I also think it was important that there were players from my country here who helped me to communicate.

"Even when I wasn't playing I already knew I had to work hard because I knew if I played a few games on the trot, I could become an important player for the team. I think I've shown that and it's also something I wanted: to have more responsibility in the team, to keep improving as a player. I've always aspired to that, and the manager trusts me more.

"Now, after a year in Liverpool, I feel I've adapted to the country. I like the city and the league is excellent, for me the best in the world. I finished last season strongly, I nearly always played. [But] we cannot become complacent, we must keep wanting more – and that's what I try to do.

"It really is a huge club, one of the biggest in the world. The club has great ambition and that is what I wanted in my career, so I'm very happy to be here."





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KEITA

Injury disrupted Naby's debut campaign but there were enough glimpses of class to assure Kopites that he was the real deal. "My first year was about adapting with the team and to the Premier League," says the Guinean international. "There are big differences between football in Germany and England and also between Leipzig and Liverpool, in my duties and the way of playing. I hope things will be even better this year."



WIJNALDUM

Gini was one of Jürgen Klopp's first major signings for Liverpool, arriving in July 2016 three weeks after Sadio Mane and Joel Matip. Last season's 1-0 win over Chelsea at Anfield – the one with *that* Mo Salah goal – also marked the Dutch midfielder's 100th Premier League appearance for the Reds. At 28 he's now at the peak of his career and says he's "hungry to do even better this year and win more."



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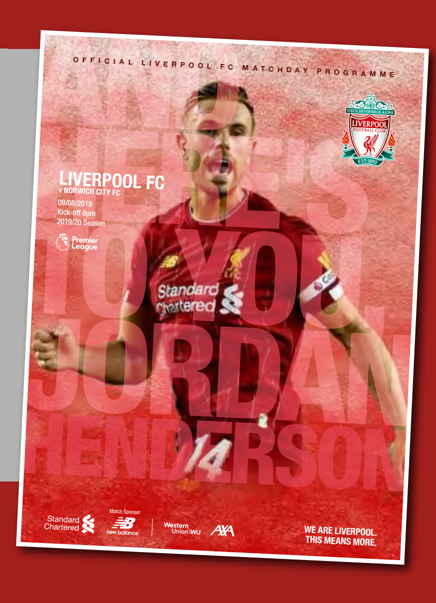


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SHAQIRI

The man with the magical left foot boasts some impressive stats from last season's Premier League: of his 24 appearances for Liverpool, 18 resulted in victories with five draws and just one defeat, and he provided six goals and three assists. Injury curtailed his pre-season involvement but "now we are all together and want to do better this year and progress."



LALLANA

"As long as I can stay fit – and I've been working hard on my fitness – then I think I can bring quality to this Liverpool team," says our no20 whose five seasons of service make him one of this squad's seniors. Of his deeper-lying role in pre-season Adam adds: "I see a lot of the ball and I'm the type of player that wants to be on the ball; I feel I can get us moving, get us out of tight situations and bring a different aspect to Liverpool."

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MILNER

The Champions League-winning midfielder says that mental strength, as much as ability and attitude, is what turns young hopefuls into world-beaters

For a young prospect like Harvey Elliott, newly-arrived at Anfield from Fulham and not 17 years of age till next April, is there a better senior figure anywhere in the Premier League than James Milner to consult about the slings and arrows of footballing fortune?

Elliott made his first (albeit non-competitive) Reds appearance as a second-half replacement for Milner in July's pre-season game against Napoli at Murrayfield. Milner was 16 years and 309 days old when he made his own first-team debut, for Leeds United against West Ham United, back in November 2002 – five months before Elliott was born.

"I was fortunate that Terry Venables [then the Leeds boss] was willing to put me in the team at the age of 16," he recalls. "He showed a lot of faith and I'll always be grateful to him for that."

By 2004 he'd left Leeds for Bobby Robson's Newcastle United then gone on-loan to Aston Villa before a permanent switch to the West Midlands. "I had one season there where I did well in central midfield and it prompted Manchester City to spend a lot of money on me." Milner became a Liverpool player in July 2015, making nine first-team appearances under Brendan Rodgers before he was succeeded as manager by Jürgen Klopp.

The Reds boss insists that Milner can still improve and the 33-year-old wholetheartedly agrees. "You can always learn, yeah. I've been fortunate enough to be playing a long time, with some great players and under some great managers, but every single day you go out on that field you can learn something.

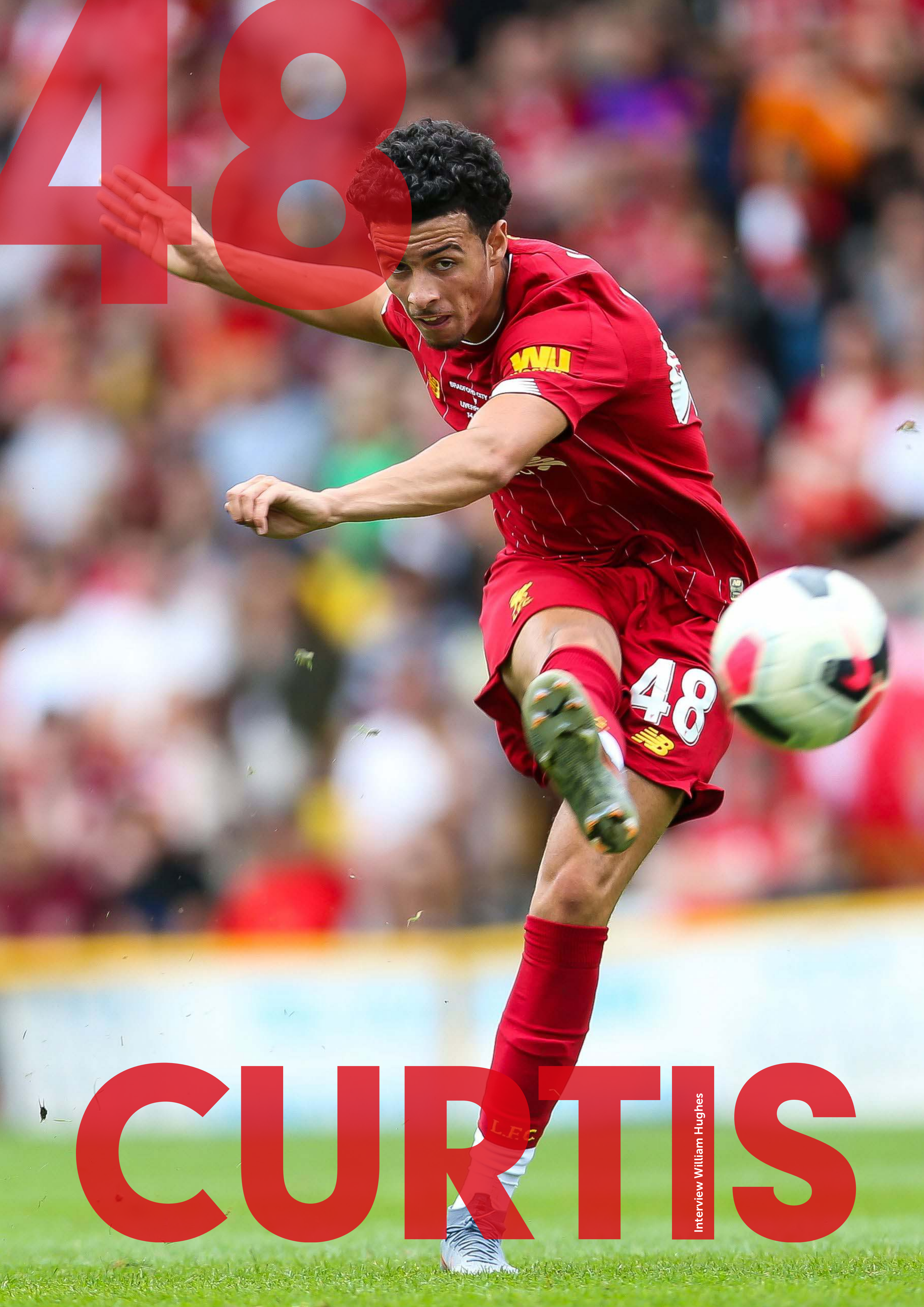
"Maybe my role's a bit more about helping the younger guys now as well, but I can learn from my team-mates, I can learn from the manager. I go into every training session with that mindset.

"There are so many ups and downs in football in a career [starting] from nine years old; disappointments, being left out of teams, injuries, so many things that can go wrong.

"So as much as you need the ability and things like that, it's the mental strength as well, and I think that's probably overlooked a lot of times from the outside.

"There are so many opinions out there and you've got to be strong enough to take them. There are going to be good times and bad times; it's about not getting too up when things are going well and too down when they're low. That's so important and probably something that's stood me in good stead."





48

CURTIS

Interview William Hughes

The talented young midfielder knows that dreams mean nothing without dedication, desire and sheer graft

You must have been itching to get back for pre-season after the highs of season 2018/19...
Definitely. I think this time around is even bigger than last year for me with all the support and getting the nod for men's [senior team] football. Now it's time for me to go out there and deliver and show what I'm all about.

Would you say last season was a bit of a breakthrough campaign for you personally?
It was a breakthrough in terms of moving from the Academy to Melwood. I wouldn't say it was really a breakthrough into the first-team and establishing myself as the full-time first-team player that I'd like to be yet.

But I've definitely got a manager and a team around me that believe that I can be that type of player and this pre-season I was aiming to try to make myself known as one of those players.

It must have been good to have that opportunity to press your claims every day...
Yes, of course. Every session that I get is definitely an opportunity to show the manager and his coaches my talent and for me to get better day by day.

Once we got into the programme of games, I think that was the biggest platform that I could have had to actually go and show them what I've learned and taken from training – and also to show him my understanding of the game, how he wants me to play and show him that I'm ready. Pre-season was massive for me.

Did you manage to switch off after such a dramatic finish to last season for Liverpool?
While the lads have been away after the end of last season there was time to rest, but for me it was more about keeping fit and keeping the thought in the back of my head that this could be my biggest season to try and get into the first-team. So my break was all about planning and thinking about how I'm going to show that I'm more mature in my playing.

The first few days of pre-season are traditionally tough – how did you find it?
It was tough but it's got to be done. When I was off, I was doing a lot of work to get myself in the best shape that I can be and I felt as though I came back flying and was competing well in all the sessions.

I've been feeling fresh and ready to go. I'm prepared for any games that come my way and I definitely think that I'm in the best shape that I can be.



JONES

What was it like being part of those celebrations in Madrid?
It was crazy. Growing up, it was just a dream for me to be a Liverpool player and being just 18 and being part of a squad that had just won the Champions League was unbelievable. But that has shown me the amazing team and family that I'm part of here and I couldn't be more happy to be around this team.

It has also shown me what I need to work hard on to become a player starting at that level. It's tough but that's what I'm aiming for. Hopefully one day I will get the chance and I can't wait for that day.

The reception on the homecoming tour was something special...
It would have been great regardless of how last season had turned out for Liverpool Football Club because the fans will always stick 100 per cent by the team. But now with winning the Champions League, I think the fans will be 100 times happier.

You'd also been in Kiev when emotions were very different 12 months earlier...
Even being there and getting the experience was amazing. It didn't go the way that everyone would have wished, but seeing how much the manager has changed things around in the team, just in that year since, means I'm thinking that the longer I stay around this team, the better I will become as a player and as a person.

Hopefully I will get chances like that to go out there and get that experience of playing in front of our great fans and getting the goals to win us another trophy like the Champions League.

Madrid must have done wonders for the confidence levels in the squad...
I'm absolutely buzzing just being around the squad so I can't imagine what the players who were actually involved on the pitch on the night are feeling. I'm guessing that they were all on absolute highs during the summer and couldn't wait to get back



and to give the fans another unbelievable year.

Hopefully this year's the one when we can go and win both the Premier League and the Champions League.

People in sport often talk about having a winning mentality but it must help when you have trophies in the cabinet...
Definitely. Getting that first trophy gives you a taste of success and you want more. Getting the second, third, fourth, really shows other teams and fans all around the world that you really are a world-class team and it wasn't just a one-off season.

So getting the first one is great but we've definitely got it in us to go and get more. I definitely think we are capable of doing it and I'm looking forward to hopefully being part of the squad and team when those trophies are being won.

It's nice to walk into Melwood and see that one of those numbers on the Wall of Champions has changed. But it's also mad that it's only one of those numbers [that has changed], when you think of the team that we had last season and how



HOPEFULLY I WILL GET CHANCES TO GO OUT THERE AND PLAY IN FRONT OF OUR FANS AND GET THE GOALS TO WIN US ANOTHER TROPHY



close we came to winning the Premier League. That just goes to show the standard of the teams at this level. But this club has got the strength to change those numbers on a regular basis and go and make history in the coming years.

Team spirit always seems good but time away together in pre-season must help too...
Just being around the building at Melwood cements it. Going away for a long period of time, when the only ones that we can rely on are ourselves and the coaching staff around us, makes the bond even better. That's good to then bring back here and when we go into the games everybody wants to graft and work hard for each other and just give that bit more to help your mate when he could be having a difficult time on the pitch.

And with the new season about to begin, you're feeling good?
Yes. As I say, I've come back in the best shape I can. But this is only the beginning for me. It's not just about training and getting myself fit, it's about being able to use that and take it into the games.

It's about making yourself want to not just be named in a team now and again but to be counted on as a real squad-player and going out there and putting on a show to help get three points for the team every week.

It's an exciting place to be. For me, this is the most exciting team to watch and to be a part of, so these are really exciting times. I can't wait to see what this season holds in store.



OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN

It's been said before but the rehabilitation from long-term injury of a world-class player really is like a new signing, especially at the start of a season. Two seasons ago, when he got injured, he was in the shape of his life, looking so positive," Jürgen Klopp says of The Ox. "I'm so happy with how it looks at the moment, but of course we are going to have to see... To buy him [now], after the impression we got when he played for us, what do we think the price would be to buy that level of player?"



BREWSTER

It takes a while to adjust to the intensity of training under Jürgen Klopp, with pre-season no exception, but starlet Rhian is definitely getting there. The boss says: "We are super positive about him, no pressure. With the talent and attitude he has, it will be fine. But when [he makes his senior competitive debut] I don't know. In a lot of pre-season moments he looked really good. The future is bright."



ORIGI

Divock's seen it all: signing for the club as a teenager, suffering a terrible injury in a derby, playing his way back to first-team fitness on the left wing, resuming centre-forward duties, and scoring one of Liverpool's most important goals ever...

A year is a long time in football. On 26 May 2018, Divock Origi was perched on a beach bar-stool in the Dominican Republic watching the Champions League final against Real Madrid with members of his family. "I'd just finished my season on loan with Wolfsburg and my mum and I were on holiday," he recalls. "So yes, it was a bit different to this year."

At the very start of that 2017/18 season Divock had been on the bench for the first leg of Liverpool's Champions League third qualifier with Hoffenheim in their Rhein-Neckar Arena. Later he'd come up against the same opponents on two occasions during his season-long switch to the Bundesliga, although he was substituted before half-time when Wolfsburg travelled to Hoffenheim in March 2018.

Fast-forward to 1 June 2019 and the jubilant scenes in Madrid's Wanda Metropolitano Stadium when Origi's late goal against Spurs sealed Liverpool's sixth European Cup success. The Belgian of course had taken the Reds to the final in the first place with his calm finish from Trent Alexander-Arnold's quickly-taken corner completing the most unlikely of comebacks in that exhilarating semi-final against Barcelona.

Combined with vital late goals in the Premier League campaign against Everton at Anfield and Newcastle at St James' Park, the forward has earned himself a reputation for being a man for the big occasion.

The remarkable turnaround in fortunes saw him mobbed by admirers at the end of the pre-season fixture at Tranmere Rovers last month. On social-media there were freshly-inked Origi tattoos on show, and LFC's official store now has a

Interview: William Hughes


27
27
L.F.C.
AXA





red-and-white mug emblazoned with 'DIVOCK' among its most popular sellers.

Whatever happens over the rest of his career, that moment in Madrid will always be a defining moment. So how often has he seen the goal back?

"I think the most times have been on Instagram, maybe when I've been passing by on the 'start page'. So yes, I have seen it a couple of times! It makes me feel very proud, happy, and all of those emotions, because it was a special moment.

"For me it is something I can be very grateful for. Winning the Champions League is something very, very special and it gives me more hunger to perform even more, help the team even more and hopefully together we can reach even more in the future."

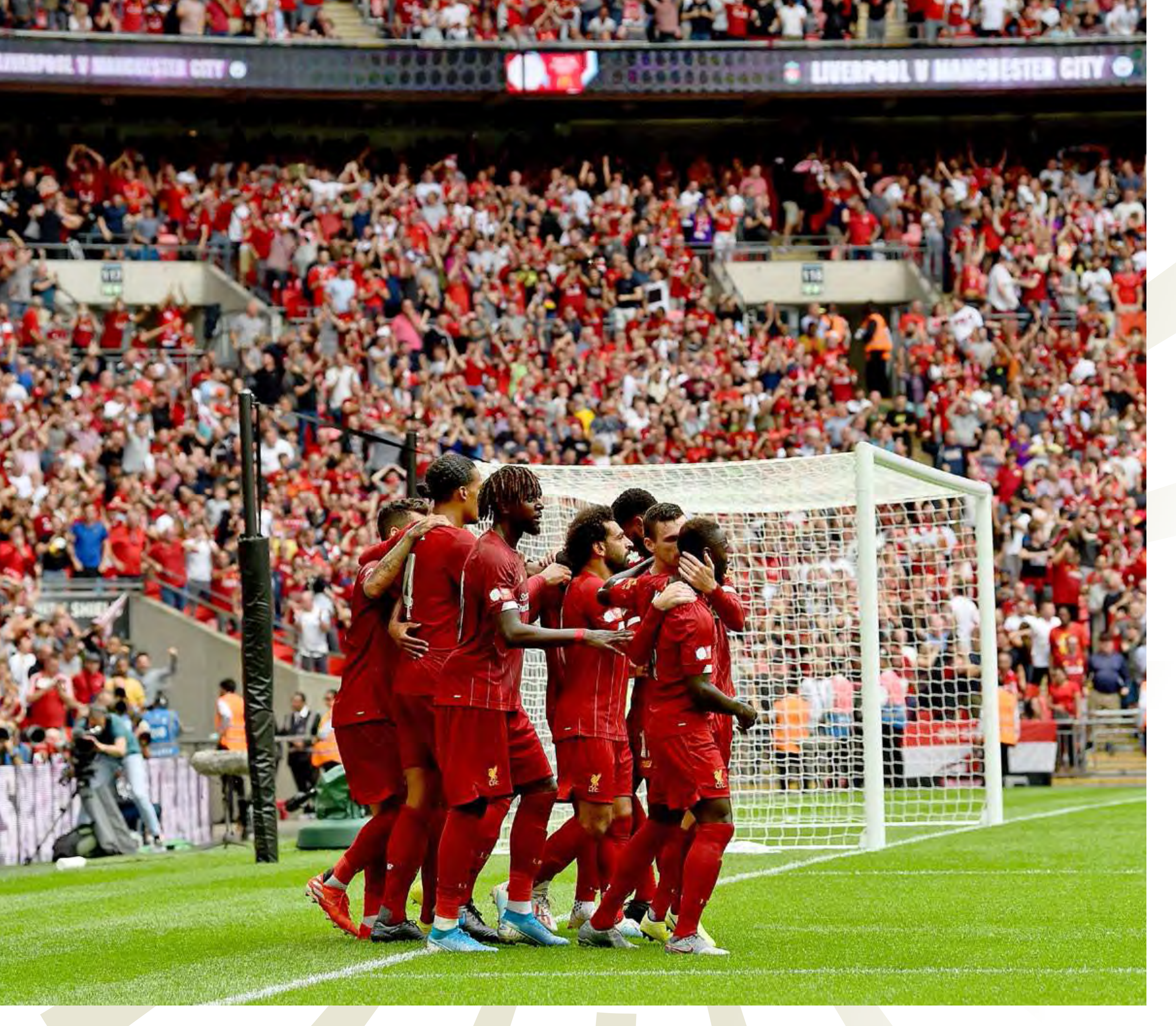
Following the highs of the post-match celebrations and the scenes during the open-top bus-tour back in Liverpool, he spent time on holiday in America when his new-found fame really hit home. "I think it definitely had an impact globally. Some people recognised me from the Barcelona goals as well as the final, so I think that's something that comes with winning the Champions League.

"A few people have mentioned my Champions League stats of three shots and three goals, too! That's not bad and I hope I can keep it up."

Liverpool's triumph was also well-received back home in Belgium. Compatriot Simon Mignolet was on the Reds bench while centre-backs Toby Alderweireld and Jan Vertonghen started the final for Spurs.







"Again, I think there is a sense of pride about the achievement in Belgium," reflects Origi. "I haven't been back there a lot of days since. After I was away with the international team I went back, but I haven't really walked around yet, but I do know that it's something that the people are very happy about."

Another man bursting with pride was his father Mike, who was playing for KV Oostende when Divock was born and also appeared for Genk and other Belgian sides as well as the Kenyan national team.

"Of course he was delighted. I think with me becoming more mature he has taken a role in the background now, but he's still there more as a fan. He was one of the first people along with my mum and my sisters to come and congratulate me after the final. He was very, very happy and he was at Melwood for the signing of my new contract too.

"For me, family is everything and having them close and seeing them happy is the most important thing."

Divock's vital contributions in helping the LFC family end their seven-year wait for silverware has been rewarded in the shape of that new long-term deal. He acknowledges that he took time to consider his options, but in the end he didn't want to be anywhere other than Anfield.

He was still a teenager when he agreed his first Liverpool contract in 2014 when Brendan Rodgers was manager. "As a young player coming into a team like Liverpool you need to adapt and find consistency. I think I was looking for growth and the opportunity for exploiting my potential.

Also, the English league is different to the French league [where he'd been playing with Lille] so there were a lot of things there: growing, maturing, becoming a man outside of the pitch…

"Last season was tough at times but I just tried to keep focusing on the right things, preparing well and enjoying my game and expressing myself. In the end I'm grateful that I got the chance to go on the pitch, prove myself and just enjoy myself really. When you do the right things, goals come and that helps the team which is a bonus. In the end it was a special season.

"There have been difficult moments in my career here so far and very, very good moments. I have a load of baggage but good baggage in terms of experiences up to now and good years in my career."

The highlight, of course, was that angled drive past Hugo Lloris in the closing stages of the final. And now, "the Champions League win has definitely given us a thirst for more.

"I am always somebody who sets goals and wants to go further and that's the case with us as a team as well. Those are the values of Liverpool Football Club, so we're going to try again in every training session and in every game, put everything in through difficult and good moments, and fight for everything. Then I think we have a good chance of positive things happening in the future."

Origi is also delighted to be working under Jürgen Klopp. "The manager and I have a good relationship. Everyone knows how good a coach he is, but before that he is a good man.

"He pushes us as a team and it's important for me to have somebody who knows football and knows how to speak with

players and help them perform to their best. I've made steps under him and that shows in how the last couple of years have been."

Divock is just one appearance away from 100 in all competitions for the Reds and he hopes to bring up the century when Liverpool kick-off the new Premier League campaign against Norwich City at Anfield on Friday 9 August.

With the regular front-three of Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane all reporting back late for pre-season due to their involvement in international tournaments this summer, Origi helped stake his claim for a starting berth against the Canaries with goals against Tranmere, Sevilla and Sporting Lisbon.

"Playing at Fenway Park then the Yankee Stadium, it was special to see all the fans and connect with them in America,. We know Liverpool has a global following but it never fails to amaze you when you see the reaction that the team receives when we go on a pre-season tour."

Now he's hoping that last season's success can be the catalyst for a silver-strewn era for the Reds. "There has been a very positive energy around the squad since the first day we reported back for training. It's a good energy to work in.

"There's a sense of being proud [at what was achieved last season] but hunger too. I am still young and we are still a young group, so I want to use this to make the next step and continue to be successful because I really believe that we have everything here to do that."

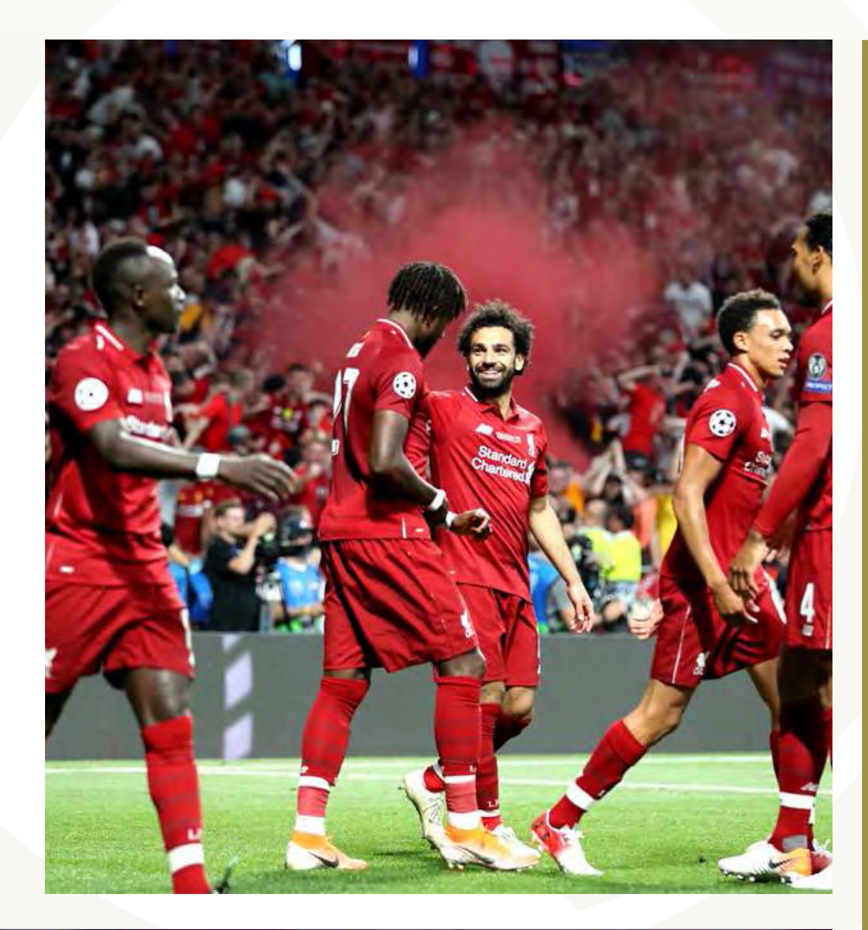
Whatever else may happen during his Liverpool career, Divock's name will be written into the club's history following his Champions League exploits of May and June 2019.

"I feel honoured, I feel proud, I feel grateful and I thank God for that moment. There are a lot of memories behind it which is what makes it so special.

"Now it's a case of re-setting and hopefully making more memories in the future. I'm ready to help the team and reach whatever we can reach. We have all the potential, so now we just need to focus again game by game.

"Regardless of what happens, we know that we have amazing fans who always back us through everything as well, so yes, I'm sure we'll keep on making positive steps."







"A story that only football can write"



Jürgen Klopp describes Origi's decision to extend his contract as "a win-win situation. We wanted to sign him again and the nice thing is he wanted to as well. Now he is this wonderful player again so it's great to have him and I'm really, really happy.

"I never forgot the situation in the Everton game [at Anfield in April 2016] when there was that harsh tackle and a red card for Funes Mori. Divock was in the best shape of his life and everybody was so positive about his future, and then things like this happen in football.

"We always know something like this can happen, but when you see the influence it has on a career, it's just a sad story because he struggled really long with the ankle. It was not easy to come back in when the team was flying and he couldn't gain confidence and stuff like that. Going on loan to Wolfsburg, it didn't really work out. Coming back, thinking about leaving, and then the season starts and yeah, it's not a miracle, but it's the nice part of the story then.

"He grew and grew. In training sessions you could see it – wow. He played a couple of games on the left wing and did well there. It's not his natural position but he can play it in a specific way, in a very offensive way.

"Then in training again we saw that he was ready again to play no9 and he did that and scored the goals. He scored unbelievably important goals and here we are."





FIRMINO

Bobby comes back, Bobby scores. It took the Brazilian ace just 17 minutes to find the net in his first pre-season appearance, in the 3-1 win over Lyon in Geneva. Now in his fifth season with Liverpool, he was the first of today's formidable front-three to arrive, signing in the summer of 2015. In recent years has a single player been so adored by the Kop?



SALAH

Mo made it clear he was itching to return after his well-earned summer-break, tweeting after the Liverpool-Lyon game in pre-season: “Great to be back, ready to go!” The stats are plain scary: 71 goals in his first two seasons with the Reds, 54 of them in the Premier League. Hold onto your hats again, it could be another thrilling ride...


1
MANE
L.F.C.
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One third of Liverpool's fabulous frontline took a little longer to return to LFC duty after a hectic summer, and he's determined to make more history

The LFCTV cameras were there to capture Sadio Mane's return to Melwood and Liverpool FC after his epic summer helping Senegal to the final of the Africa Cup of Nations – and what a warm welcome he received from team-mates and staff alike.

The 27-year-old forward rejoined the Reds following the FA Community Shield curtain-raiser with Manchester City at Wembley, with his manager confident that "he will be in good shape."

Like the rest of the current first-team squad Sadio looked delighted to be back, and like many of those same players he also has a new long-term contract with the club as part of Jürgen Klopp's smart strategic thinking.

Mane has previously spoken of his desire to attain legendary status at Liverpool. He was immensely proud of becoming the fifth African-born player in the club's history to bring up a century of appearances for the Reds, a milestone he achieved back in January (the others incidentally are Bruce Grobbelaar, Gordon Hodgson, Arthur Riley and Craig Johnston).

"Of course I want to be a legend for Liverpool," he told the magazine last season. "I will do everything possible to achieve everything possible.

"Reaching 100 games means a lot to me. To play this many games for a club like Liverpool is incredible. Like I have always said, I am very happy to play for this club and every single day I am enjoying being here and trying to do everything to win something for this club."

Which is exactly what he did over the remainder of season 2018/19. One Champions League trophy down, lots more silverware to come, we all hope very much.

Another determining factor in Mane's magnificent form has been the strong relationship he enjoys with his manager. Klopp has followed his no10's career for many years and has a strong level of trust in him.

"To be honest he is a great man, you can see it and he is a lovely person," says Sadio. "He loves all his players and is very close to his players too.

"He also demands a lot, but he never puts pressure on us other than asking the best of us. He only asks you to do your best in whatever you are doing and also to enjoy it.

"I think that's important because under him everybody has progressed a lot as everyone can see. It's very important for us to work with him for more years."

HOEVER

Dutch defender Ki-Jana declared himself "really happy" to sign a long-term contract with the Reds in the summer – his first professional one – adding that it showed "a lot of trust from the club, so I will try to do them proud and show what I can do for this club."

But the teenager, who made his senior debut in last season's FA Cup third-round tie at Wolves, aged 16 years and 354 days, stresses: "I need to be realistic. I hope to make some minutes in the first team this year, of course, but I know that I will probably play more games for the U23s. I will just train hard with the first team, show them what I can do and if there is a chance, I will be ready. That's what I am hoping for."

Manager Jürgen Klopp adds: "Ki-Jana is a wonderful kid and a sensational young player who can learn so much. Especially in the Napoli [pre-season] game when he came on, on the left side, it was maybe his best 15 minutes in the pre-season.

"The boys try to adapt to what we ask them for... You forget so quickly these boys are so young. He's still 17, it's just crazy. But everything will be fine, he's a fantastic footballer and I'm really happy that we have him for longer."





KELLEHER

Surgery in early July on a broken wrist kept goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher out of action for a few weeks. Now the 20-year-old, who committed his future to the club this time last year, will be keen to make up for lost time this season.

"I'm really enjoying my football here so I was happy to sign [in August 2018]. I've been doing the same things but getting better every day. Training at Melwood, you improve much more.

"The manager has said I'm doing really well and to keep going the way I am. Improving every day, training with the players. That'll be my aim."

ELLIOTT

Like Ki-Jana Hoever, the 16-year-old winger made an appearance against Napoli in pre-season, his move from Fulham confirmed earlier in the day.

"I could say so many positive things about the boy," said the manager.

"We signed him, he came here, he decided on us. He could have gone pretty much everywhere, but he wanted to be part of Liverpool.

"Already he is the youngest ever Premier League player and has broken quite a few records because of his talent. Now he is here so let's work with him. He needs game-time, we will see where he gets that. But he is obviously a fine, fine footballer and that's why we were really interested."

Harvey has taken the number 67 jersey but cannot sign a professional contract until he turns 17 next April.




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YOUNG AMERIC

An album-full of images from Liverpool FC's Women's pre-season

Liverpool FC Women joined the men on their tour of the United States as they stepped up preparations for the new FA Women's Super League season.

Vicky Jepson's squad crossed the Atlantic where they were hosted by the club's official family partner, Joie Baby, who are also a new principal partner of LFC Women.

The ladies in red played two friendlies while on the tour. First they drew 2-2 with Cleveland Ambassadors at the Alumni Stadium in Indiana with goals from forwards Ashley Hodson and Courtney Sweetman-Kirk, before beating Metropolitan Conference Allstars 6-0 at Jordan Field in Boston, Massachusetts.

Last season's top scorer Sweetman-Kirk bagged four of the goals with England youth international Rinsola Babajide supplying the other two.

Club CEO Peter Moore said: "Ensuring LFC Women could embark on their first-ever tour of America is another sign of our commitment to the 'two teams but one club' ethos."

With the girls set to kick off the new FA WSL season against Reading FC Women at Prenton Park on Sunday 8 September (2pm), coach Jepson says: "The tour has tested us physically and mentally with a non-stop schedule.

"There have been some fantastic challenges on and off the pitch which we're very grateful for and hopefully now that'll put us in good stead and push us forwards for the future."



Group photo with the Metropolitan Conference Allstars after a 6-0 win at Jordan Field in Boston

ANS

tour of the United States





Captions and managers: Vicky Jepson and Sophie Bradley-Auckland join Jürgen Klopp and Jordan Henderson after touching down in the States

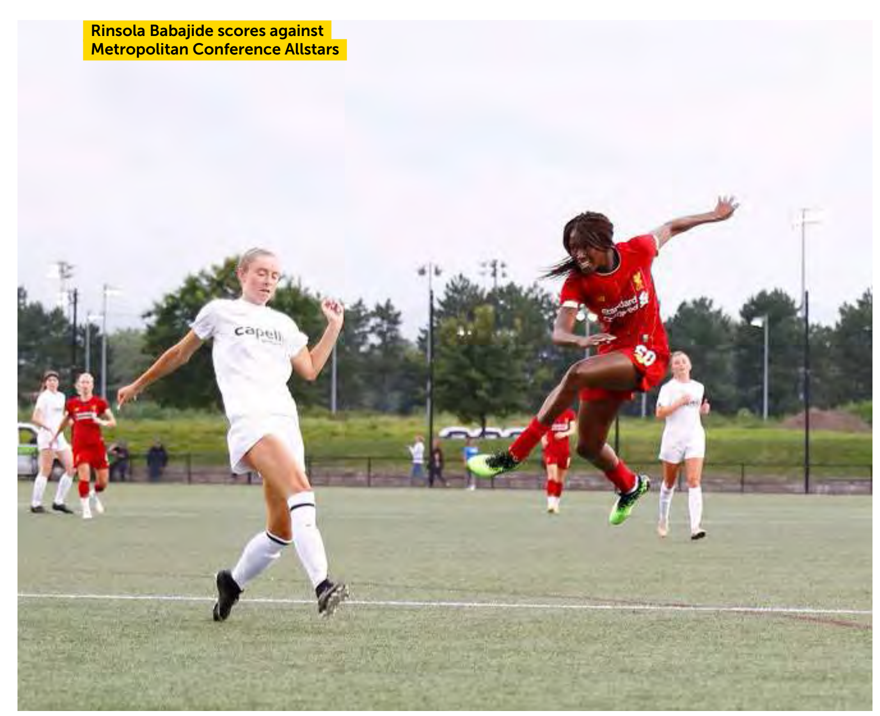

Making an appearance during the men's friendly against Borussia Dortmund at South Bend, Indiana



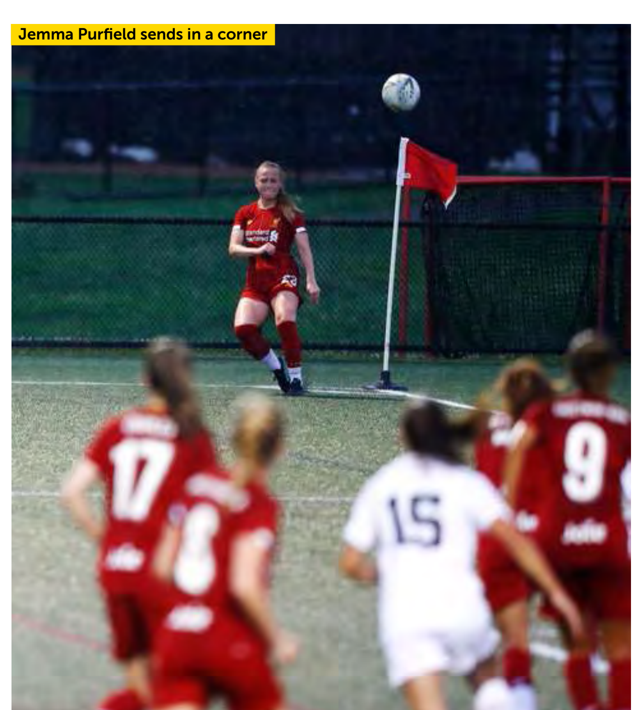








Rinsola Babajide scores against Metropolitan Conference Allstars



Jemma Purfield sends in a corner



Fran Kitching, Courtney Sweetman-Kirk and Bo Kearns are all smiles in the rain





Vicky Jepson addresses her squad after the win in Boston

LFC FOUNDATION ON TOUR

While Jürgen's players worked up a sweat on the pitch the club's official charity worked hard to make a difference for Stateside youngsters

As well as the first team's pre-season preparations, the recent US Tour allowed Liverpool Football Club to engage in lots of work with good causes in the States, with LFC Foundation running coaching clinics and events in conjunction with local organisations.

In Notre Dame, LFC Foundation coaches worked alongside Michiana Echo which supports the development of children through football, as well as the Logan Centre supporting people with disabilities. Community members in Notre Dame had the opportunity to take part in coaching clinics and meet-and-greets with both the men's and LFC Women teams.

In Boston, LFC Foundation worked in partnership with the Red Sox Foundation to deliver activities and visits groups such as Boston Children's Hospital, military veterans programme HomeBase, and Boston Scores who run football and education-based programmes. The Foundation also checked in with Camp Harbour View which aims to provide young people and their families with more well-rounded life experiences. There was also a gender equality session with young people at Fenway Park.



Vladi with one young participant

On the tour's last stop, LFC Foundation worked with the Fire Department of New York (FDNY), delivering coaching sessions for local children in Queens.

Overall Foundation coaches delivered soccer clinics to over 650 youngsters in the US, in eight different soccer clinics in South Bend, Boston and New York during the nine-day trip. The club's official mascot Mighty Red was on hand for support, alongside special guests Vladimir Smicer and LFC Women's Ashley Hodson, Jess Clarke, Jade Bailey and Melissa Lawley.

Matt Parish, director of LFC Foundation, said: "To be able to invite so many children from the local area to our football sessions was brilliant and something we really enjoyed doing in the US.

"All the kids came to us with a great attitude and a real enthusiasm to learn and improve their skills. Being able to host these sessions is a very important part of our aim as a Foundation to create life-changing opportunities for children and young people."

Supporters can follow the LFC Foundation's work on Twitter @LFCFoundation.




L.F.C.
Foundation
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WE'RE GOING TO THE GAME!



Red Neighbours


Joel calls out the numbers

Champions League-style draw sees first-teamer Joel present local schoolchildren with Premier League match tickets for Anfield in 2019/20

LFC star Joel Matip joined the club's Red Neighbours programme recently to host a special ticket-draw for local pupils.

Over 100 youngsters representing 25 local schools headed to Anfield for the Champions League-style draw, where they were each allocated the four home games they'll attend during the 2019-20 Premier League campaign.

For the third consecutive season Red Neighbours will donate a total of 1,100 free tickets to 21 primary and four high schools in the L4, L5 and L6 areas as part of its free-tickets-for-schools initiative.

Defender Joel said: "This is a fantastic scheme for the local kids and it's been brilliant for me to come down and meet so many of them.

"We always love to get out in the community and spend time with our fans, so it's been a really enjoyable afternoon and we hope the kids are looking forward to coming back to Anfield for a game once the season is underway."

Providing local children with the opportunity to experience an Anfield matchday forms part of one of Red Neighbours' four key areas of focus: creating memorable experiences for young people.

Gayle Hall, careers co-ordinator at Notre Dame Catholic College, said: "Our pupils have had so many wonderful experiences over the last few years thanks to Red Neighbours and the ticketing initiative.

"Being able to go to Anfield to watch a game is a dream come true for a lot of our children, never mind being a part of events like this and having the chance to meet first team players. It's something they'll never forget."

Red Neighbours focuses on four key areas of need in and around the Anfield area: creating memorable experiences for young people; food poverty and education; support for the elderly community and encouraging a physically-active community.









The defender with some happy, Anfield-bound pupils



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We might have mentioned it before, but Liverpool Football Club are Champions of Europe for a sixth time, so to celebrate the glory of Madrid an official hardback souvenir book is being released this month.

CH6MPIONS OF EUROPE tells the story of the Reds' sixth European Cup triumph, right from the start. From the aftermath of Kiev through the group stage to the dramatic knockout games, and from the travelling Kop taking over Madrid and the magnificent homecoming in Liverpool after the Reds' 2-0 win against Tottenham, it's the official story of how Liverpool won a sixth European Cup.

Produced by the team behind the official matchday programme and magazine – that's us! – it includes insight from Jürgen Klopp, his players and striking photography...and you could win one of SIX copies in our exclusive competition.

Simply tell us:

Who passed the ball to Divock Origi for his goal against Spurs in the Champions League final?

(a) Fabinho (b) Mo Salah or (c) Joel Matip

Email your answer, name, address and contact phone number with 'CH6MPIONS OF EUROPE COMPO' **in the subject line to liverpoolfcmag@reachsport.com before Monday 2 September 2019.**
Normal Reach PLC competition rules apply, prizes will be sent out as soon as possible and you can order CH6MPIONS OF EUROPE from sportmediashop.com/book/ch6mpions-of-europe.

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What's On

AUG/SEPT



SEASON 2019/20: BACK ON KOP

August is here, at last, and Anfield is the place where the 2019/20 Premier League season kicks off, with the Reds hosting newly-promoted Norwich City on the month's first Friday (kick-off 8pm).

The top-flight's summer transfer-window closes the day before, at 5pm on Thursday 8 August, the Premier League having made the decision to bring forward the date (English teams will still be able to sell abroad as other countries have different closure dates).

A busy start to the new campaign continues on Wednesday 14 August when Liverpool head to the Besiktas Vodafone Stadium in Istanbul to contest the UEFA Super Cup against Chelsea. The Reds will be looking to win the trophy for the fourth time.

The month of August ends with Premier League fixtures on the final three Saturdays, away to Southampton (3pm), home to Arsenal (5.30pm on Sky) and a trip to Burnley (also 5.30pm on Sky).

AUG/SEPT

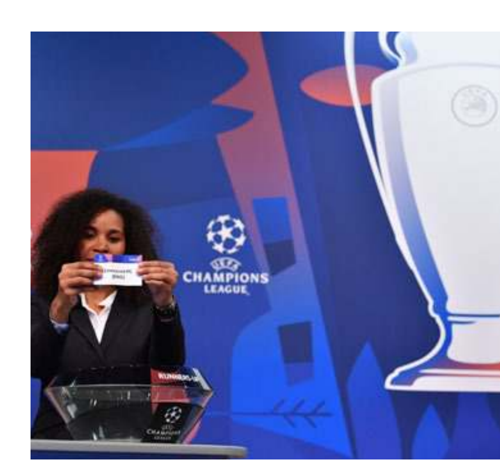
What's On

CAMPIONE LIVERPOOL...

Ten days after Jordan Henderson raised the Champions League trophy above his head in triumph, the draw for the 2019/20 preliminary round was made. Since then there have been three qualifying rounds, and six two-legged play-offs are scheduled for 20/21 and 27/28 August...after which comes the group-stage draw, in Monaco on Thursday 29 August.

Among those teams already confirmed for the groups alongside the Reds are: Barcelona, Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid and Valencia (all Spain); Juventus, Napoli, Atalanta and Inter Milan (Italy); Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, RB Leipzig and Bayer Leverkusen (Germany); Paris Saint-Germain, Lille and Lyon (France); Zenit Saint Petersburg and Lokomotiv Moscow (Russia); Benfica (Portugal), Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukraine), Genk (Belgium) and Salzburg (Austria); and of course Manchester City, Chelsea and Tottenham (England).

Matchday One fixtures take place on 17 and 18 September. The final will be held on Saturday 30 May 2020 at the Ataturk in Istanbul.



ALL THOSE YEARS AGO...

53 years since a Roger Hunt goal won the Charity Shield versus Everton on 13 August 1966.

48 years since George Sephton made his debut as the 'Voice of Anfield' on 14 August 1971.

58 years since Ian St John scored his first Liverpool goal, in a 4-1 win at Sunderland, on 30 August 1961.

42 years since Kenny Dalglish joined Liverpool from Celtic for a record £440,000 on 10 August 1977.

48 years since Kevin Keegan scored on his LFC debut on 14 August 1971.

3 months since Liverpool won the European Cup/Champions League for a sixth time on 1 June 2019!

And 15 years since Spanish duo Xabi Alonso and Luis Garcia joined Liverpool FC on 20 August 2004...

Among Kopites little was known about Xabi and Luis when the club announced their double-signing for £10.7 million and £6 million respectively from Real Sociedad and Barcelona. They would prove to be absolute bargains.

No Spaniard had ever played for LFC but that all changed with the appointment of Rafael Benitez as manager on 16 June 2004. "Alonso and Garcia will lift the team," promised the new boss. "They will provide more possibilities and their arrival will make the team work harder.

"Xabi [then aged 22] is important for us because he is strong and has experience and he wants to improve. With [Steven] Gerrard, we have long passes and movement. With [Didi] Hamann we have good positioning and short passes. With Xabi we have two possibilities: short passes, long passes...a lot of things.

"Luis [26] is a very skilful player, a player with talent, clever in midfield. He can play in a lot of positions, always with an attacking mentality. For us it is important to have this type of player. Normally he scores about ten goals a season as a midfielder and If I was a supporter now I would want to see Luis Garcia. For sure."

Alonso's technical brilliance in the middle of the park was immediately apparent, while Garcia's goalscoring contributions were often thrilling.

Both were key figures in the club's run to that emotional fifth Champions League triumph, in May 2005.

Both tweeted their joy when number six was won on 1 June 2019.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Joel Matip
28 on 8 August

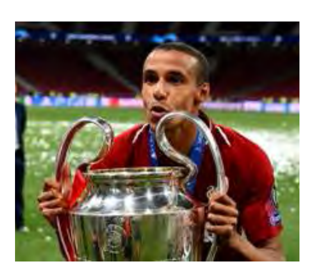
Taiwo Awoniyi
22 on 12 August

Djibril Cisse
38 on 12 August

Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain
26 on 15 August

Bolo Zenden
43 on 15 August

Barry Venison
55 on 16 August



Steve McMahon
58 on 20 August

Michael Thomas
52 on 24 August

Didi Hamann
46 on 27 August

Rhiannon Roberts
29 on 30 August

Alan Kennedy
65 on 31 August

Pepe Reina
37 on 31 August


Carlsberg
Carlsberg



2019/20 Fixtures & Results

AUGUST		SCORE/KO	TV
Sun 04	Manchester City (CS, N)	1-1*	BT
Fri 09	**Norwich City (H)**	**8pm**	**Sky**
Wed 14	Chelsea (Super Cup, N)	8pm	BT
Sat 17	Southampton (A)	3pm	
Sat 24	**Arsenal (H)**	**5.30pm**	**Sky**
Sat 31	Burnley (A)	5.30pm	Sky
SEPTEMBER			
Sat 14	**Newcastle United (H)**	**12.30pm**	**BT**
T/W 17/18	UCL Matchday 1	TBC	BT
Sun 22	Chelsea (A)	4.30pm	Sky
Wed 25	Carabao Cup 3	TBC	BT
Sat 28	Sheffield United (A)	12.30pm	BT
OCTOBER			
T/W 01/02	UCL Matchday 2	TBC	BT
Sat 05	**Leicester City (H)**	**3pm**	
Sat 19	Manchester United (A)	5.30pm	Sky
T/W 22/23	UCL Matchday 3	TBC	BT
Sun 27	**Tottenham Hotspur (H)**	**4.30pm**	**Sky**
Wed 30	Carabao Cup 4	TBC	
NOVEMBER			
Sat 02	Aston Villa (A)	3pm	
T/W 05/06	UCL Matchday 4	TBC	BT
Sat 09	**Manchester City (H)**	**3pm**	
Sat 23	Crystal Palace (A)	3pm	
T/W 25/26	UCL Matchday 5	TBC	BT
Sat 31	**Brighton (H)**	**3pm**	
DECEMBER			
Wed 04	**Everton (H)**	**8pm**	**AP**
Sat 07	Bournemouth (A)	3pm	
T/W 11/12	UCL Matchday 6	TBC	BT
Sat 14	**Watford (H)**	**3pm**	
T/W 17/18	Club World Championship SF	TBC	
Wed 18	Carabao Cup QF	TBC	
Sat 21	Club World Championship F/3rd	TBC	
Thu 26	Leicester City (A)	3pm	AP
Sat 28	**Wolverhampton W (H)**	**3pm**	
JANUARY			
Wed 01	**Sheffield United (H)**	**3pm**	
Sat 03	FA Cup 3	TBC	
Wed 08	Carabao Cup SF 1	TBC	
Sat 11	Tottenham Hotspur (A)	3pm	
Sat 18	**Manchester United (H)**	**3pm**	
Tue 21	Wolverhampton W (A)	7.45pm	
Sat 25	FA Cup 4	TBC	
Wed 29	Carabao Cup SF 2	TBC	
FEBRUARY			
Sat 01	**Southampton (H)**	**3pm**	
Sat 08/15	Norwich City (A)	TBC	
T/W 18/19	UCL last 16 1	TBC	BT
Sat 22	**West Ham United (H)**	**3pm**	
T/W 25/26	UCL last 16 1	TBC	BT
Sat 29	Watford (A)	3pm	
MARCH			
Sun 01	Carabao Cup final (N)	TBC	
Wed 04	FA Cup 5	TBC	
Sat 07	**Bournemouth (H)**	**3pm**	
T/W 10/11	UCL last 16 2	TBC	BT
Sat 14	Everton (A)	3pm	
T/W 17/18	UCL last 16 2	TBC	BT
Sat 21	**Crystal Palace (H)**	**3pm**	
Sat 21	FA Cup 6	TBC	
APRIL			
Sat 04	Manchester City (A)	3pm	
T/W 07/08	UCL QF 1	TBC	BT
Sat 11	**Aston Villa (H)**	**3pm**	
T/W 14/15	UCL QF 2	TBC	BT
Sat 18	Brighton (A)	3pm	
Sat 18	FA Cup SF	TBC	
Sat 25	**Burnley (H)**	**3pm**	
T/W 28/29	UCL SF 1	TBC	BT
MAY			
Sat 02	Arsenal (A)	3pm	
T/W 05/06	UCL SF 2	TBC	BT
Sat 09	**Chelsea (H)**	**3pm**	
Sun 17	Newcastle United (A)	3pm	
Sat 23	FA Cup final (N)	TBC	
Sat 30	UCL final (N)	TBC	BT
TBC	West Ham United (A)	TBC	

All fixtures subject to change. AP = Amazon Prime *lost 5-4 on pens

SCORERS

Matip (pens: Shaqiri, Lallana, Chamberlain, Salah)









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Under Jürgen Klopp this team is sharp and settled and its self-belief is formidable

This time last year there was more hope than realistic ambition that Liverpool could compete with Manchester City for the Premier League title. Over the course of the ten months that followed, Jürgen Klopp's side proved that they could. That's why things feel different now.

There's a belief and confidence among the Liverpool players that they can genuinely challenge City. The manager has trusted the same group of players, who are all at very good ages, and I think there is a lot more to come from them as a team.

Whether they can go one better than last season remains to be seen, but I'm in no doubt that Liverpool will challenge irrespective of it being a relatively quiet summer in the transfer-market.

I believe and trust in the manager. If Klopp is happy with the players he has got then I trust him because he has taken Liverpool back into a position where we not only qualify for the Champions League every year but have won it.

He's also put us in a position where we are challenging to win the Premier League – the ultimate for Liverpool supporters – so if he says he will only bring players in that improve the squad, but feels those players aren't currently available, then so be it. I've got complete faith in Klopp, he knows what he is doing.

The players showed last year that they've got a hunger to achieve. They wanted to be successful after missing out in the Champions League final against Real Madrid in Kiev. That gave them a hunger to achieve, a hunger to win something, and they went one better by winning the Champions League.

I'm hoping the same thing happens in the Premier League this season, that the players say to themselves 'we just missed out last year, but it's about us this year'. If they have the same hunger and desire that they displayed in the Champions League last season then I think we're in for an exciting battle for the Premier League title.

The Community Shield between Liverpool and Man City was a taste of what is to come. Liverpool lost on penalties but deserved to win and I think City were shocked at how many chances we created and how sharp some of our players were after missing much of pre-season.

Roberto Firmino and Mo Salah were both outstanding, despite hardly being involved in pre-season, and we still had Sadio Mane to come back into that front-three. To see Liverpool reach the levels they did at Wembley following a disjointed pre-season in terms of player availability was hugely encouraging. It was a reminder to City that Liverpool will be right on their toes and want to win the Premier League title.

A lot of people think City will be far too good. It's not the case. It's going to be a two-horse race again and it's difficult to see anyone else getting involved. Tottenham will probably be the nearest to Liverpool and City, given the relatively settled environment and understanding Mauricio Pochettino has with his players. But I find it difficult to see Chelsea, Arsenal and Manchester United competing for the title considering all the changes at those clubs. You never know, but they'd all need a lot of luck with injuries.

For Liverpool, keeping the squad fresh enough to compete for all the different competitions we'll be playing in this season may be the biggest challenge. Having the right mentality to do that, to say 'last year was great, but let's go again' is the key.

The ambition is to win the Premier League and defend our Champions League title. We should have a kinder group draw, having been 'stitched up' last year when we were seeded third, but will also have to balance playing in the Club World Cup in December. It's going to be a busy season, but that's what we want.

We want to see Liverpool compete for all the major trophies and I'm sure every supporter will be looking forward to going to Anfield this season to see an exciting team that is both enjoyable to watch and capable of winning more silverware.



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